

**RADICAL AMAZEMENT AND DEEP SYMPATHY:
A MYSTICAL-PROPHETIC APPROACH TO PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND CARE
INSPIRED BY THE WORKS OF ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL**

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presented to
the Faculty of the
Claremont School of Theology**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by
Daniel Joseph Miller**

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CLAREMONT
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This Dissertation, written by

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ABSTRACT

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by

Daniel Joseph Miller

This dissertation offers an alternative vision and approach to pastoral theology and care, one that diverges from recent dominant models of American pastoral care that have tended to be centered almost exclusively on “troubled” individuals, to be predominantly psychological in theory, tone and orientation, and to be almost entirely palliative or reparative in focus and practice. In contrast, this approach, called mystical-prophetic, inspired by the works of the Jewish theologian and philosopher, Abraham Joshua Heschel, is concerned not only about the individual, but the community and cosmos as well. Psychologically conversant and adept, it is primarily theological and spiritual in theory, tone, and orientation. In addition to being a supportive ministry to individual persons experiencing the various trials that characterize life in this world, a mystical-prophetic approach understands and practices care prior to and independent of the care receiver’s being in distress or suffering. In addition, this approach is committed to understanding concern for justice and the healing of the cosmos as constitutive dimensions of pastoral care. I call these interrelated emphases evocative-formational and sympathetic-transformational care respectively. The work of Rabbi Heschel, with its emphasis on becoming human and holy by cultivating, supporting, and encouraging the complementary attitudes of radical amazement and prophetic sympathy and the attitudes

and actions that emerge from them, informs and guides this alternative approach to soul care, influencing its motivation, task, method, and purpose.

This alternative approach is necessary because one of the most serious predicaments facing persons and communities today appears in the form of a spiritual crisis, a crisis of the soul. This crisis manifests itself as the increasing incapacity or unwillingness *to be moved*, that is, as the atrophy of religious feeling, understanding *feeling* to mean the total response to reality, and *religious* feeling to be the total response to Ultimate Reality, that is, God. This contemporary malady appears both as the loss of contemplative consciousness and living, and as indifference and the loss of compassionate presence and responsible action.

Thus, the explicit aim and sustaining hope of this pastoral approach (evocative-formational and sympathetic-transformational) is to cultivate and support authentically human and deeply holy persons and communities who will assist God in making the universe what God dreamed and intended it to be. In the Jewish tradition the complimentary movements of attending to individual persons and caring for the cosmos are referred to as *tikkun ha nephesh* (mending the soul) and *tikkun ha olam* (mending of the world).

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Rabbi Heschel wrote: *Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy.* Deeply aware of the holiness of this life and the blessing you all are for me, I say simply, "Thank you."

Especially for Meg Miller and Jean Yesthal
—women of substance with compassionate hearts—

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Thesis

The purpose of this dissertation is to present a mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral theology and care inspired by the philosophical and theological works of the Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel. The central thesis of this dissertation is that the complementary attitudes of radical amazement and deep sympathy as explicated in the writings of Abraham Heschel and re-imagined from a pastoral theological perspective, illuminate a foundational motivation, task, method, and purpose for pastoral care. Such an approach will help insure that pastoral care is truly holistic, equally committed to the care of souls (*curae animarum*) and to the care of the world (*curae animarum mundi*), what Jewish tradition refers to as *tikkun ha nephesh* (mending the soul) and *tikkun ha olam* (mending the world). By transposing Heschel's work for pastoral theology and practice, I intend to respond to a world that suffers from the loss of a contemplative consciousness and from indifference to human agony and planetary anguish.

By the words mystical and prophetic, I mean those counterpart and constitutive elements of religious existence whose essence pastoral theology and care seeks to evoke,

enable, and encourage.¹ In this study, unless dealing directly with Heschel's use or interpretation of Jewish mysticism, I use the term mysticism in an ecumenically broad, non-technical and non-doctrinal sense. Although understood broadly, I have in mind a certain, identifiable way of viewing, understanding, and engaging in life and in the world. The definition and description by Carmelite monk, William McNamara, only a slight rewording of the renowned spiritual master Thomas Merton's opening paragraph in New Seeds of Contemplation, conveys well the particular characteristics of this world-view and way of life.² McNamara states:

Mysticism is man's long, loving look at reality to which he is united by love. It is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. Its activity is its own end. Mysticism has no utilitarian purposes: just looking, loving, being utterly, magnificently, wildly useless. It is life itself fully awake and active and aware that it is alive. Mysticism is awe and wonder at the sacredness of life and of being and of the invisible, transcendent and infinite abundant source of being. It knows the source obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude beyond reason. . . . This act by which man sees who he is—not in isolation, but against the background of eternity—and so simultaneously and experientially sees who God is—this is genuine mysticism.³

A mystic, then, is someone who is committed to perceiving and practicing life in this way. Mysticism suggests a constant awakening to the ineffable and gratuitous mystery of life and to the "full, conscious, and active"⁴ response to the Source of life who is known

¹In this dissertation, I use the terms mysticism and contemplation interchangeably, as I do the words mystical and contemplative.

²Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation (New York: New Directions, 1961), 1.

³William McNamara, Christian Mysticism: The Art of the Inner Way (Rockport, MA: Element, 1981), 8.

⁴Austin Flannery, gen. ed., "The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," Chap. 1, Sec. 1, No. 14 of Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996). For the past forty years these three words have been the hallmark of the renewal of the Roman Mass, signaling the shift in the assembly's role and experience from passive observer to actively engaged participant. They seem equally appropriate to describe the mystical way.

and experienced but in a way that is beyond either reason or simple faith.⁵ Like prophecy, mysticism involves awareness and response. The awareness is of the sublime and gratuitous mystery of everything—of being itself, of life lived, yes, but also of people, places, and things, of simple encounters and transforming moments, of the sense of the presence of God, and of the experience of that presence as passionate love and personal care. Mysticism that is rooted in the Jewish and Christian traditions from which I write and live, does not refer to an altered state of consciousness or to living in another realm called “spiritual.” Rather it involves living in this world but “with a vivid awareness of infinite Being at the roots of our own limited being, [with] an awareness of our contingent reality as received, as a present from God, as a free gift of love.”⁶

In this project, except when specifically addressing Heschel’s understanding of the prophetic consciousness and life, by prophecy, I mean, the living out of the prophetic life, that is, extending compassionate presence toward others (sympathy) and offering passionate resistance in the face of forces and situations that diminish or deny life (works of justice). The way the biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, understands the prophetic imagination and ministry augments this statement. He claims:

The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.⁷

Speaking of prophetic ministry in an enculturated church and society, Brueggemann emphasizes three essential components necessary to create and enact this alternative

⁵Merton, New Seeds, 1.

⁶Merton, New Seeds, 3.

⁷Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 113.

consciousness: criticizing, energizing, and re-envisioning. Bringing the claims and memory of the tradition to impinge upon the situation of enculturation, the action of *criticizing* refers to challenging and working to dismantle the dominant and destructive consciousness. The task of *energizing* refers to a way to nurture and move persons and communities toward the promise of a new situation. The act of *re-envisioning* involves the imaginative re-presentation of and the courageous commitment to another way of being and doing.⁸

The intersection of the mystical and the prophetic life is love. What the mystic and the prophet have in common is that they both are great lovers of God and of God's creation. This characterization challenges caricatures of the mystic as religious rarity or glassy-eyed escapist and the prophet as fortune-teller or finger-pointing crank. Their expertise lies in receiving and responding wholeheartedly to divine love.

When translated into practice, a mystical-prophetic vision of life and care relegates the human sciences, although invaluable and necessarily in dialogue with theology, to a position that is secondary to and supportive of the religious interpretation of human existence and a religious approach to pastoral care. A creative transposition of Heschel's work will advance the understanding and practice of pastoral theology and care that is more poetic than scientific, more contemplative than clinical. It will be imaginative and sympathetic. It will be evocative and formational, as well as restorative and transformational, and significant not merely for individual persons but also for the communal and cosmic order.

Influenced by biblical, rabbinic, mystical, and Hasidic texts and traditions,

⁸Ibid., 13-14.

Heschel's work paves the way for a clearly articulated theological approach to pastoral care that recovers its spiritual roots and makes a case for its unique benefits. The mystical-prophetic approach that issues from Heschel's writings provides, at the least, a complement, and at the most, a corrective to a history of pastoral theology and practice that has tended to focus almost exclusively on the individual person, to be predominantly psychological in theory, tone, and orientation, and as such to be almost entirely reparative in its practice.

Abraham Heschel's work contributes to the construction of a mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care in the following ways. First, since the nature of pastoral care is spiritual, those offering it seek to respond from their true center to the deepest part of other persons in the concrete realities of human living. Because the mystic and the prophet are most in touch with the essence of life, "in touch with this world of flesh and blood, of hard facts and concrete realities,"⁹ as well as with "the Real within all that is real,"¹⁰ it makes sense to consider them as formative figures for caregivers. By doing so, we loosen the tight grip the psychotherapeutic paradigm has had on pastoral caregivers and recover the spiritual core of care. What is unique about the mystic and the prophet is that they are not primarily helpers but lovers. The mystic lives especially in response to the lavish gratuity of God and the enchantment of life. The prophet lives chiefly in response to the pathos of God and God's need of them to care for and help mend the broken world. Thus, a mystical-prophetic approach shifts our understanding of care from help to love, preventing pastoral care from becoming merely one more "helping

⁹McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 20.

¹⁰Merton, New Seeds, 3.

profession.”¹¹ From a theological point of view, help—its inducement and enactment—is grounded in love. In this approach, love is the overlooked obvious, yet the defining and driving force of care which necessarily includes being helpful.

Second, Heschel offers a comprehensive view of the human person that is theological in nature, sober and realistic in tone, while being lyrical, timely, and hopeful in spirit. For Heschel, human being and being human are not the same. Human being, or existence, is given at one’s birth but being human is not a guarantee. Being human, that is, becoming and acting human, is a vocation and a task, a privilege and a responsibility, a divine intention and a human destiny. In order to help persons to actualize the quiet eminence of their being,¹² it is incumbent upon pastoral theologians and caregivers to have a working understanding of what it means to be human. Our assumptions and convictions about what being human means necessarily shape the why and how of pastoral care. They also effect its direction. A pastoral theology that retrieves the centrality of the human person as *imago Dei*, image of God, necessarily leads to spiritual formation, that is, toward a pastoral care whose goal it is to help human becoming happen. Therefore, a central purpose of mystical-prophetic care is to support the person in becoming a person. The Jewish mystical tradition refers to this soul-work as *tikkun ha nephesh* (mending or perfecting the soul). *Tikkun ha nephesh* together with *tikkun ha olam* are the twin movements that help fashion not only a spirituality with integrity but a pastoral care with integrity as well. Stated theologically and most directly, the vocation of

¹¹The problem with viewing pastoral care chiefly as *help* is that it tends to shift the focus from the act to the result. In other words, did the help help?

¹²Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Who Is Man?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 35.

the pastoral caregiver is to become holy and the task is to help others become holy.

Without reducing Judaism either to individualism or communalism, Heschel's anthropology also maintains the necessary tension between the person and the community. "We are Jews as we are men,"¹³ he says. Commenting that "Jewish existence is a personal situation," makes it clear that, for Heschel, existence is not something nebulous—it is religious existence, Jewish existence—and that "there is a vital personal question which every human being is called upon to answer, day in and day out."¹⁴ He complements this sentiment with the following conviction: "Judaism is not only a certain quality in the souls of the individuals, but primarily the existence of the community of Israel."¹⁵ From Heschel we learn the necessity of holding in one thought the individual and the faith community, the person and the cosmos as well.

Third, the distinct characteristic and central pillar of Heschel's theology—the pathos of God—provides a well-defined and worthy motivation for pastoral care. The God of the prophets, and for Heschel, is no Unmoved Mover but "the Most Moved Mover."¹⁶ Pathos describes how God acts in the covenantal relationship: freely, emotionally engaged, compassionately involved, and intimately affected. Humankind is not only an image of God but also a perpetual concern of God. The depth of God's concern profoundly affects the prophet. The prophet is a *homo sympathetikos*. Prophets

¹³Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Individual Jew and His Obligations," in The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 189.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 192-93.

¹⁵ Abraham Joshua Heschel, Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 45. Originally published and later reprinted under the title, Man's Quest for God.

¹⁶Fritz Rothschild, ed., Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism From the Writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1959), 25.

align themselves with God's care and sorrows concerning the world. By extension, before pastoral care is the response to human and non-human suffering, it is the response to divine pathos. Understood as the progeny of this prophetic consciousness, pastoral caregivers are *homo sympathetikos* who are moved to act sympathetically toward other people since this is the befitting and corresponding human response to divine pathos and the index of one's humanity. In a mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care, divine pathos is the fundamental motivation and becomes the defining spirit of caregiving as it is enacted.

Fourth, informed by Heschel's understanding of human becoming (or what it means to be holy), a mystical-prophetic approach realizes care must include the cultivation of wonder and awe as well as the expression of compassion, the evocation of both radical amazement and deep sympathy, the practice of reverence and resistance, praise as well as justice. Heschel insists, "There is no compassion without a sense of wonder and reverence for the mystery of being."¹⁷ Pastoral care will appear at the nativity of this millennium empty handed unless we bring together the *evocative-formational* and the *sympathetic-transformational* dimensions of care. The former term refers to the calling forth of the qualities of enchantment and awe inherent but hidden in each person or community and the ongoing formation of those qualities. The latter term refers to activating the attitude of transitive care, of which God is the supreme example and source, in order to put sympathy into action and to cooperate with God in the redemption of the world. A mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral care means attending to both of

¹⁷Heschel, "Idols in the Temple," in The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 59.

these movements in the spiritual life. To my knowledge, there is no contemporary writer in the English language who has more eloquently and powerfully articulated and embodied the wedding of the mystical and prophetic dimensions of faith than has Rabbi Heschel.

Finally, when transposed for pastoral purposes, Heschel's interpretation of Kabbalistic and Hasidic concepts will suggest an innovative and practical mysticism that offers a creative alternative to the current, predominantly clinical approach to care.¹⁸ The symbolic language of the *sefirot* as first found in Sepher Yetzirah (Book of Creation) and later developed and systematized in the thirteenth century Sepher ha-Zohar (Book of Splendor),¹⁹ "the greatest work of the Jewish mystical tradition,"²⁰ as well as five closely related concepts gleaned from Lurianic Kabbalism and Hasidism and either inferred or dealt with directly in Heschel's work, will help us construct a mystical-prophetic pastoral vision and practice. These concepts include: *tzimtzum* ("divine contraction"), *shevirat ha-kelim* ("the breaking of the vessels"), *galut ha shekinah* ("the exile of the divine presence"), *mitzvot* ("commandments" or good deeds), and *tikkun ha olam* ("repair of the world"). Together the idea of divine-human correspondence and effectedness, the significance of the common deed, and human involvement in the repair of the universe, will help fashion an approach to care that while personal will guide us away from a

¹⁸Kabbalism refers to the esoteric and mystical expression of Judaism. Hasidism originated in the mid-eighteenth century as a renewal movement within Judaism. It incorporated into daily living many concepts from Kabbalah. It is still practiced today.

¹⁹Marvin A. Sweeney, "Ten Sephirot," in Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, eds. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, 2d ext. rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 837-43.

²⁰Arthur Green, A Guide to the Zohar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), xii.

preoccupation with the individual as the exclusive recipient and beneficiary of caregiving and toward a more communal and cosmic orientation.

I mention only briefly here the relevance of these ideas that I will expound upon later in more detail. In an attempt to account for the possibility of creation when originally all was filled with God (*Ein Sof*, i.e., the Infinite), Isaac Luria, considered by many to be the greatest sixteenth century mystic, extrapolated an elaborate and exquisite theory. It not only explained how the divine made room for the world through a process of contraction (*tzimtzum*) and then emanation, but also accounted for the presence of evil through the shattering of the divine “vessels” which were unable to withstand and hold the divine energy (*shevirat ha-kelim*). An evocative image of the hospitality of God, it also gave hope at the time to an exilic Jewish community by declaring the divine presence itself (the *Shekinah*) to be exiled from its Source (*galut ha shekinah*). It also emphasized that the human mission is to join God in the redemptive repair of the cosmos (*tikkun ha olam*) accomplished primarily through holy deeds (*mitzvot*).

A mystical orientation to pastoral theology and care that aims to cultivate radical amazement (the evocative-formational approach) will be enhanced by the concept of *tzimtzum*. A unique metaphor for the mystical dimension of pastoral care, *tzimtzum* translated into pastoral practice means that the tone and modus operandi of this approach will be characterized by a certain self-limitation, offering a contemplative, engaged receptivity rather than using a more pro-active, kerygmatic method. Central to this approach will be the sense of creating a “sacred space” where the other can feel free and encouraged to “come into being.” Interpreting pastoral care in light of *Shekinah*—the feminine grammatical term used to describe the divine indwelling among the people—

and *mitzvot* will mean placing a high priority on practicing attentive, contemplative presence and involve understanding caregiving as “prayer in the form of a deed.”²¹ As such, it plays an integral part in conceiving of pastoral care in relation to *tikkun ha olam* (the sympathetic-transformational approach). Again, this view saves us from an atomized view and practice of care. It expands the horizon of our motivation, consecrates our task, challenges our method to be more daring and creative, and elevates the purpose of the work with which we are charged and humbly accept to do.

A mystical-prophetic approach to theology and life, let alone to care, encourages us to celebrate every enchantment and to view each deed, each encounter, as contributing to the great, redemptive, cosmic, divine dream. Whether we are comforting a mother grieving the death of her child, introducing first-graders to the sacredness of silence or the awesome sight of the star fields; whether we are visiting the incarcerated, the sick, and the homebound, feeding and sheltering the homeless, or fighting for more low-income housing; whether we are going to the house of prayer, planting trees, or cleaning up rivers; whether we are fighting against street violence, capital punishment, or resisting the emotional, economic, global, and spiritual ravages of war, we have the opportunity and obligation to fulfill our covenantal responsibility by participating in the transformation of the world.

In a mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care inspired by Rabbi Heschel’s work, we hope to create a space where others can come into being, to cultivate wonder and awe as a radical response to life, to bring back into the world God who is exiled, and to assist God in mending the broken world through human sympathy, prayer, reverent

²¹Heschel, Quest for God, 69.

living, and sacred but common acts of justice and love. The mystical and the prophetic are constitutive dimensions of full human becoming, the heart and the soul of ministry through which we express and realize the peculiar essence of pastoral theology and care.

Scope and Limitations

To focus this dissertation I have intentionally chosen Abraham Heschel, arguably one of the most significant spiritual writers of our time, to help recast and reorient pastoral theology and care. This dissertation is a prolegomena of sorts, the beginning of a larger, future venture in which I will make use of other voices and other religious traditions to develop more fully a mystical-prophetic approach to and practice of pastoral theology and care.²² It is obvious that the writings of Abraham Heschel are central to this work and yet this is not a work of systematic theology. Despite the careful explication of his work, in a real sense Heschel is not so much the subject of this dissertation as the inspiration for it. To use another image, Heschel's writings are the exquisite prism through which we are stimulated and enabled to see a new definition and direction for pastoral theology and care while recovering their spiritual roots. Let me also be clear that this project does not presume to present a Jewish pastoral theology and care per se but one that emerges from and is informed by the unique theological and spiritual vision of one devout and remarkable Jew, Rabbi Heschel. The approach here to Heschel's work is

²² As a transpositional work that is *inspired by* Rabbi Heschel's life and thought, I hope to tease out and to offer creative possibilities of a mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care primarily for the communities of faith I know best, namely, Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant. This focus is prudent due to space limitations as well. It is also a matter of practical wisdom acknowledging both that there is enough in common between Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant traditions to draw some conclusions and to offer some suggestions as well as enough significant differences between these traditions and, for example, Orthodox and fundamentalist Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions and communities.

thematic, descriptive, and transpositional.²³

This dissertation offers a theoretical framework and a theological vision. It is not my primary intention to present an exhaustive, precise description of specific skills, pastoral strategies and techniques named mystical-prophetic. This work does not directly address the specific ministry of pastoral counseling, for example. Although I am convinced that this approach has important and creative implications for the conceptualization and practice of pastoral counseling, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to enunciate or expound upon them. Readers involved in the ministry of pastoral counseling are encouraged to translate ideas and insights found here that might be helpful into their own situation and setting.

A mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care is not offered here as the exhaustive, panacean model of pastoral care. Nonetheless, it is a new orientation, a creative reshaping, and a much-needed option to the liberal Protestant, problem-centered, psychotherapeutic paradigm that has dominated pastoral theology and ministry in the United States for the past half-century.

Original Contribution

This dissertation makes the following original contributions: First, there are a number of studies on the work of Abraham Heschel but none relate his writings explicitly to pastoral theology and care, let alone use them to construct an alternative approach to its conception and practice.²⁴

²³It is beyond the scope of this present project, for example, to explicate in any detail Heschel's phenomenological methodology. See Lawrence Perlman, Abraham Heschel's Idea of Revelation (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989).

²⁴For studies on Heschel see, for example, Samuel Dresner, Heschel, Hasidism, and Halakha

Second, it not only calls for the recovery of the spiritual roots of pastoral theology and care but also offers a construct that shapes its overall vision as well as its practice. Transposing Heschel's theology for pastoral purposes offers an alternative to the tendency among the ecclesial community itself to reduce the spiritual nature of caregiving to mean the use of "religious resources" as mere tools of the trade that can be utilized in particular pastoral situations and encounters. The religious dimension of pastoral care is not reducible to the knowledge of how to use the Bible during pastoral visits, or how to pray and what prayers to use with the sick and dying, or how to use guided meditation in counseling sessions. Consequently, this project offers a fundamental rethinking of the religious nature of pastoral care.

Third, in the field of theology, many theologians and spiritual guides have addressed the relationship between the active and the contemplative life, but very few writers have addressed this issue from the perspective of pastoral theology and care. Kenneth Leech's book, Spirituality and Pastoral Care, represents one of the few book length exceptions.²⁵ In addition this dissertation will make a significant contribution by

(New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Edward Kaplan, Holiness in Words: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Donald J. Moore, The Human and the Holy: The Spirituality of Abraham Joshua Heschel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989); Maurice Friedman, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Elie Wiesel: You Are My Witnesses (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1987); John Merkle, The Genesis of Faith: The Depth Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1985); John Merkle, ed., Abraham Joshua Heschel: Exploring His Life and Thought (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1985); Byron L. Sherwin, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Makers of Contemporary Theology (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979); Franklin Sherman, The Promise of Heschel (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1970).

²⁵ Kenneth Leech, Spirituality and Pastoral Care (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1989). See also Katherine Marie Dyckman, and L. Patrick Carroll, Inviting the Mystic, Supporting the Prophet: An Introduction to Spiritual Direction (New York: Paulist Press, 1981). In the last chapter, the authors briefly sketch some issues and concerns of the mystic and prophet as they relate to the pastoral ministry of spiritual direction. Although not focused exclusively on the relationship between the contemplative and active dimensions of faith, many of Henri Nouwen's books deal with the relationship between spirituality and pastoral care. See for example Henri J.M. Nouwen, Creative Ministry (New York: Doubleday, 1971); In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989); The Way

considering the relationship between the mystical and prophetic dimensions of life within the context of pastoral theology and care, relating human becoming to communal and cosmic healing and wholeness. The added benefit of this approach is that it is ecumenical in spirit.

Fourth, the radical nature of Heschel's vision, especially his dynamic image of God, as well as the concepts from Jewish mysticism presented above, offer new metaphors and creative perspectives for theory and practice.

Lastly, as a Catholic I value a liturgical spirituality that emphasizes the importance and interplay between Word and Sacrament and I appreciate each alone and both together as a means of grace.²⁶ More than this, however, I believe it is Catholicism's attention to the contemplative dimension of spirituality and its emphasis on the social implications of the gospel that have the most to offer contemporary pastoral theology and caregiving. Perhaps the most important contribution this dissertation makes is the promotion of a pastoral theology and care that attends both to the inner life and the outer life, to the individual person and to communal and global realities, to issues of contemplation as well as to care, to issues of formation as well as to transformation. Pastoral theology, care, and counseling have been relatively slow in seeing and making the necessary connections, on the one hand, to contemplative spirituality, and on the other hand, to social justice. Although currently experiencing resurgence, I believe the contemplative or mystical way, by and large, has not been brought to bear on pastoral

of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry (New York: Seabury Press, 1981); and The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1972).

²⁶Ralph L. Underwood, Pastoral Care and the Means of Grace (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

theology and care. I am committed to drawing attention to how the contemplative way can contribute to a holistic pastoral theology and care. Given that pastoral theology, care, and counseling have been influenced both by Reformed Protestantism, with its emphasis on the proclamation of God's word (*kerygma*), and on the psychotherapeutic model, with its emphasis on talk therapy, this dissertation makes a unique contribution by its call for the discovery (or the *recovery*) for pastoral purposes of a mystical or contemplative consciousness and practice. This has been virtually nonexistent in treatments of pastoral theology and care, both in terms of conception and execution. Similarly, only recently has social justice been viewed as a necessary dimension of the discipline and practice of modern pastoral theology and care.²⁷ Contemplative spirituality and spiritual formation as well as prophetic awareness and social justice are not just welcome additions to the pastoral field but constitutive dimensions of a holistic and authentic pastoral theology and care.

In addition, while numerous persons are addressing many of the problems mentioned above, too few, to my knowledge, are questioning and offering an alternative approach to the long-standing view that pastoral care and counseling is aimed exclusively (or even primarily) at troubled or distressed persons.²⁸ Whereas pastoral theology and care have a rich history of caring for the sick, the lonely, the confused, the bereaved, the

²⁷Years ago when applying to a Ph.D. program in Pastoral Theology at a well-known graduate school, I expressed interest in reclaiming for pastoral theology, care and counseling, the spiritual works of mercy and social justice. I was accepted to the graduate school but was immediately (and tellingly) switched into the Religion and Society program where I was told my interests would be better served. Today, I hope such a move would not be deemed necessary or appropriate.

²⁸Examples of this view can be found in William Clebsch and Charles R. Jackle, Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective: An Essay with Exhibits (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 4-5; Leroy Howe, The Image of God: A Theology for Pastoral Care and Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995); William E. Hulme, Pastoral Care and Counseling: Using the Unique Resources of the Christian Tradition (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), 9.

dying, and the emotionally broken, little attention if any has been devoted to caring for the emerging and still-forming six-year old or twelve-year old child who is receptive and relatively unscarred. We know how to design care and treatment plans for those already bruised and battered (literally and figuratively), but we are less adept at knowing how to cultivate what for Heschel are both the essential pre-theological attitudes and the chief characteristics of mature, holy faith: existential humility, wonder, awe, reverence, gratefulness, indebtedness, appreciation, radical amazement, and joy, to name some but not all. Occasionally these themes and topics have been handed off unthinkingly to religious educators, but more times than not they have gone unnoticed and been neglected altogether. In this mystical-prophetic approach, I hope to reclaim them for pastoral theology and care. It is what I mean by the terms mystical, contemplative, and evocative-formational.

The Problem

The earliest expression of pastoral care in the Church was called *cura animarum*, the care of souls.²⁹ That it was souls that were identified as the object of care in this discipline is especially suggestive and implies a unique and eminent task. This dissertation offers an approach to *cura animarum* that diverges from the most recent and dominant models of American pastoral care. Such an approach is necessary I believe, in agreement with Heschel, because one of the most serious predicaments of our day appears in the form of a spiritual crisis, a crisis of the soul. This view identifies the source of many personal ills and most if not all of the ills in the world—the cruelty and suffering

²⁹John Thomas McNeill, A History of the Cure of Souls (New York: Harper, 1951), 1.

intentionally, indifferently, or inexcusably inflicted on other creatures or other persons by those who consider themselves human beings—to be the betrayal of the divine design of one's soul.

Unlike the modern tendency to divide the human person into body, mind, and spirit, the ancient Hebrew understanding of the soul (*nephesh*)³⁰ referred to the totality of the person.³¹ Fr. Aelred Squire says, “Man does not have a soul, he is a soul.”³² Understood in this way, soul refers to the truest essence of the human person, that unique givenness that paradoxically points humans beyond themselves toward the transcendent, while at the same time establishes persons as singularly human by orienting them toward their own deepest nature. Rather than being “things” that one may choose to believe or not believe in, the contemplatively-oriented psychiatrist, Gerald May, points out that *soul* and *spirit* are instead descriptive aspects of our existence. The former refers to our essence and the latter to the aspect of that essence which gives it power, motive force, and fundamental energy.³³ Spirit enables and empowers the soul to be itself, to be soulful. The animated soul is what makes humans more than machines and makes self-

³⁰This paper will often use transliterations of Hebrew words. The various sources that I use and quote often transliterate Hebrew words in English differently, for example, *nefesh* or *nephesh*, *tzimtzum* or *tsimtsum*, *tikkun* or *tiqqun*. I have simply chosen one spelling of each word and used it consistently throughout. This means that occasionally the same word might be spelled differently when quoted from a text.

³¹Jewish mysticism speaks of a tri-partite view of the “souled” person: (the soul (*nephesh*), the spirit (*ruah*), and the super-soul (*neshamah*).

³²As quoted in Gerald May, *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 32. Regarding the issue of inclusive/exclusive language, while using inclusive language at all times myself throughout this dissertation, I have chosen to leave the texts of others as they are even when the language is not inclusive. Specifically, in the case of Abraham Heschel, his writings precede the more recent appreciation for the importance of inclusive language.

³³*Ibid.*

transcendence possible. When coupled with the words crisis or care, the terms *soul* and *spiritual* signal the depth of both our contemporary predicament and the necessary response to which this dissertation speaks.

The particular problem this dissertation addresses is the contemporary persons' seemingly deepening unwillingness and incapacity *to be moved* and the deleterious consequences. On a personal level, it appears especially as the loss of contemplative awareness. On a social level, it manifests itself particularly as indifference and a lack of compassion. The former represents a loss of consciousness, the latter a loss of conscience. As a diagnosis of the soul, *not being moved* describes a lack of *feeling* in the sense that Charles Davis understands that term in his book, Body As Spirit.³⁴ Davis frees the word *feeling* from an imprisonment that is based on an unfortunate, long-lasting misidentification. Whereas many people equate it with emotions, sentimental affectivity, or the non-cognitive, Davis argues that feeling refers to *the total response to reality*.³⁵ As a total response, feeling includes but is not reduced to the emotions, just as it is more than an intellectual response but not devoid of cognition. Davis maintains that feeling refers to "our affective responses understood as conscious, insightful responses to intelligently grasped situations" and implies "rational appreciation of what is felt."³⁶ The words, "rational appreciation of what is felt" suggest the human person's capacity to be moved, in the sense of being acted upon, being impressionable and open. The phrase, "responses to intelligently grasped situations" alludes to the human beings' willingness to be moved,

³⁴Charles Davis, Body as Spirit: The Nature of Religious Feeling (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976).

³⁵*Ibid.*, 13.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 4.

in the sense of interacting with, becoming involved in, and taking action. *Religious* feeling, then, refers to the total response to reality, whether spontaneous or deliberate, that appreciates the reality *as it is* while at the same time senses that it alludes to mystery and makes possible the mediation of an experience of the transcendent.³⁷

Throughout history the complementary characteristics of spirituality identified above as mysticism and prophecy have been referred to variously: contemplation and action, the inner and the outer way, openness and responsiveness, reverence and responsibility, prayer and struggle, and spirituality and service, to name just some.³⁸ This dissertation speaks to the atrophy of religious feeling, to the loss of a mystical-prophetic consciousness. It is noticeable, on the one hand, by the paucity of wonder, awe, and gratefulness and on the other hand, by the scarcity of sympathy, concern, and compassionate action. This loss, understood in the light of Davis' notion of religious feeling, connotes both the loss of awareness and the lack of response. In other words, what is at stake is the loss of contemplation and compassion, the disappearance of radical amazement and genuine human sympathy. The predicament to which I am speaking goes to the core of what it means to be human, to be alive, let alone to be a person of faith. Consequently, the problem this project addresses can be viewed as a *crisis of holiness* since, from the perspective of faith and thus from the vantage point of the pastoral theologian and caregiver, God is the Ultimate Reality and holiness is the conscious

³⁷Ibid., 25.

³⁸It is my strong conviction that "spirituality and service" is an inadequate if not false way to refer to the two essential movements of the spiritual life. In my terminology, spirituality refers to the spiritual life in its entirety. Service is a constitutive component of an authentic spirituality and not its polar opposite. This paper is in part a response to this misconception and its negative consequences. For a clear exposition of and response to this fallacy, see Robert McAfee Brown, Spirituality and Liberation: Overcoming the Great Fallacy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988).

appreciation of and total loving response to this Reality. Understood as the total loving response to reality and to the Real within all reality, holiness calls for and requires both the mystical and the prophetic engagement in life. Pastoral theology and care are to the end of holiness and holiness involves care of souls and care of “the soul of the world.”³⁹

To identify the crisis as fundamentally spiritual in nature, therefore, does not situate the problem outside or beyond this world. Quite the contrary, it is the failure here and now to be fully aware of, affected by, awake and responsive to the deepest realities of everyday life, and to the mystery and divine presence to which they allude or to whom they cry out for redress. Not unknown to other ages, these ailments of the soul are especially severe today, exacerbated by two distinctive realities of the present age: the modern scientific mentality and modern technology. Many if not most contemplatives would agree that there is nothing inherent to the scientific method or to technology that makes them intrinsically oppositional to the mystical life. Rather, they become dangerous and potentially lethal to the contemplative consciousness and way of life when they become the dominant interpreter or sole arbiter of reality, as is often the tendency with science, or co-opted by power and its abuse, which is often the case with modern technology, or divorced from ethics and moral discernment to which both are susceptible.

Finally, the problem insinuates that religion itself has not adequately called into question these post-modern ideologies or offered an alternative vision that is more in keeping with the eminence of the human person and committed to caring for the soul of

³⁹I borrow this term from James Hillman. What I have in mind by the use of the term “soul of the world” is not so much a pantheistic view of life but rather the conviction not only that the universe is an *animated* world but more so that the essence or *soul* of this world is sacred because it is of divine origin. James Hillman, The Thought of the Heart and The Soul of the World (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 1992).

the world. Within the domain of religion, pastoral theologians and caregivers, in particular, are entrusted with the role and charged with the responsibility of kindling and nurturing persons and communities to be mystically awake and prophetically alive. It is because this charge is first an act of love, of which care is the paramount expression, that it necessarily concerns pastoral theologians and caregivers. It is not, in other words, only a matter of education. Therefore, it should not be considered the exclusive mission of religious educators, or the private trust of religious education. It is first and foremost an action of care.

My position is driven not by competitiveness with religious educators, but rather by the conviction that spiritual formation is a fundamental act of care oriented toward full human becoming. This, as I stated earlier, is the central task of caregivers and therefore falls within the province of pastoral theology and care. It is not that religious educators have wrested away from pastoral caregivers the formational aspect of the spiritual life, but that by adopting a medical or clinical model, which emphasizes only one pole of care—one oriented toward illness, diagnosis, treatment—pastoral theologians and caregivers have handed over to religious educators what I call the *evocative-formational* dimension of religious existence to religious educators. This is unfortunate. Formation and education are not complements to care, but two essential expressions of it. In the religious tradition, care of souls is the fundamental act of love directed toward others. As such, it includes spiritual formation. That is, *cura animarum* prompts, encourages, and guides spiritual formation.

Care means and involves more than helping those in trouble.⁴⁰ Framing it as such

⁴⁰Clebsch and Jackle, *Pastoral Care*, 4-5.

seriously distorts and weakens its meaning and alters and limits its mission. My intention is to work toward retrieving for pastoral theology and care the formational component of religious life which, along with the *sympathetic-transformational* dimension, insures its integrity and makes it whole. Emphasizing both poles of the spiritual life, a mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care contributes to creating and sustaining a holistic spirituality. After all, what could be more caring, more loving, than to enable, help shape, and support the self-transcendence of the human person and not merely wait until they need to be bandaged or healed? My hope is that this dissertation will play a part, if only a small one, in contributing both to a holistic pastoral theology and care and to a holistic spirituality for individuals and communities.

Re-imagining pastoral theology and practice from a mystical-prophetic approach means returning love to its rightful place and thereby influencing the motivation, task, method, and purpose of care. The aim of this dissertation is to offer such a vision and practice. Care of souls and care for the soul (that is, the *livingness*) of the world require that we evoke, cultivate, and encourage both a mystical consciousness and a prophetic conscience, support both a mystical attitude and practice and a prophetic consciousness and action. In order to respond adequately to the signs of the time, we must understand the necessary and dynamic relationship between these two dimensions of life and faith and their contributions to the ministry of care.

As a reflection on and a critical, theoretical reconstruction of who we are and what we do as pastoral theologians and caregivers, what I intend is not merely to offer a theological addendum to pastoral situations. It is also my hope that such a vision will be more than an “if-then” proposition writ large, whereby I present Heschel’s thought and

then list the pastoral implications. That Heschel's work lends itself to transposition for a new understanding of pastoral theology and care is both a tribute to his substantive and creative vision and an indication of areas in need of attention. It also is in keeping with the deep commitments of his life and faith. My hope is that such a critical-constructive approach will be emancipatory and transformational not only for pastoral theologians and caregivers but for persons, communities, and the world that they seek to accompany, love, and serve. We will consider now how Rabbi Heschel views and articulates the problem identified above.

Heschel's Understanding of the Problem

According to Heschel, to look honestly at the historical circumstances that have brought us to this contemporary moment indicates that "as civilization advances the sense of wonder almost necessarily declines."⁴¹ Lost is both the poetic sensibility that looks for and is open to "the indefinable dimension of all existence" and the will to wonder.⁴² The depreciation of the sense of the ineffable, obliviousness to the overtures of the mystery and meaning that transcend the self, the unawareness of our living in the great fellowship of all beings, is directly related to human callousness whereby the sensibility of human beings is so greatly reduced, their sense of horror so diminished, that "it did not enter our hearts that images of God were led to slaughter."⁴³ Let us examine what Rabbi Heschel

⁴¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Publishers, 1951; reprint, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966), 37 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

⁴² *Ibid.* Heschel claims poetry is to religion what analysis is to science.

⁴³ Kaplan, Holiness, 121. This reference is to the atrocities committed by the Nazis during World War II.

sees as the roots of and the reasons for the resistance to being moved by the sublime miracles that are daily with us or by the anguish and suffering in our midst or just beyond the reach of our consciousness and consciences.

A Spiritual Crisis

Rabbi Heschel believes that “the world is in turmoil and its crisis is not primarily political but spiritual.”⁴⁴ He writes:

In this crisis people would in vain turn to psychology or sociology for solutions because these sciences, important as they are, do not have the answer to ultimate problems. . . It is not within their power to answer certain problems with which we are all faced: How can one preserve one’s integrity in a world filled with intrigue, flattery, and falsehood? How can a man be constantly exposed to meanness, malice, and jealousy and not be corrupted himself? What is the value of being moral in spite of the defeats of the moral man in the atmosphere of cynicism in which we live? What is the meaning of being alive and of living at this particular time?⁴⁵

Heschel is not unaware or unappreciative of the contributions of the social and behavioral sciences. He understands their positive function as well as their limitations.⁴⁶ However, so pressing, so ultimate are these problems that plague the individual person and human society, Heschel maintains, that only an equally earnest and fundamental response will be sufficient to understand and counter them. His depth theology offers both a framework for understanding the problem and a strategy for responding to it.

⁴⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Jewish Education,” in Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 238.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ In an autobiographical anecdote, contemporary psychiatrist and spiritual guide, Gerald May, says something similar to Heschel: “It became clear that psychology and psychiatry, though they can be immensely helpful, do not and cannot explain everything. There are limits to the psychological universe, and one must go beyond those limits to seek answers to the deepest questions of life.” May, Will and Spirit, 2.

Evil as Threat and Opportunity

In keeping with his prophetic forebears, Heschel's conviction is that it is humankind's relationship with God that is at the center of the human predicament. To pronounce the problem facilely or woodenly as sin or as the presence of evil is to sidestep the dilemma and to relinquish prematurely the rewards of the dynamic tension at the heart of the human situation, for "there is nothing in this world that is not a mixture of good and evil, of holy and unholy, of silver and dross."⁴⁷ Familiar with this notion found in the Zohar and other mystical sources, Heschel explains that when God created the world light and darkness, mercy and judgment, the profound and impenetrable, the good impulse and the evil impulse were all wrapped in one another, intertwined.⁴⁸ In an article on the work of his friend, Reinhold Niebuhr, Heschel points out:

In Jewish mysticism we often come upon the view that in this world neither good nor evil exists in purity, and that there is no good without the admixture of evil nor evil without the admixture of good. The confusion of good and evil is the central problem of history and the ultimate issue of redemption. The confusion goes back to the very process of creation.⁴⁹

The human predicament is located in this tension of opposites, and in discerning the good in the evil and the evil in the good.⁵⁰ Heschel spells out the predicament and task confronting humans in this way:

⁴⁷ Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), 371.

⁴⁸ Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Confusion of Good and Evil," in The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 134.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Abraham Joshua Heschel, A Passion for Truth, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973; reprint, Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 1995), 40 (page citations are to the reprint edition). Two of Heschel's spiritual guides were the Holy Baal Shem Tov and the Kotzker. The Baal Shem's "concern was to liberate the good within the evil, whereas the Kotzker's concern was to eliminate the evil found in the good."

All of history is a sphere where good is mixed with evil. The supreme task of man, his share in redeeming the work of creation, consists in an effort to separate good from evil and evil from good. Since evil can only exist parasitically on good, it will cease to be when that separation will be accomplished. Redemption, therefore, is contingent upon *separation* of good and evil.⁵¹

Sin does not exist in a vacuum apart from forgiveness, apart from holy deeds, anymore than humanity exists apart from God. Heschel states: "Evil is not man's ultimate problem. Man's ultimate problem is his relation to God."⁵² The existential conundrum confronting humankind is whether life will be lived primarily as an ongoing opportunity for good or for evil, for mitzvah or for sin, for holiness or unholiness. "Man has to choose between awe and anxiety, between the divine and the demonic, between radical amazement and radical despair."⁵³

Even though Heschel believes wholeheartedly that God's compassion is greater than God's judgment—that God is invested in the covenant—and despite stating that evil is not humankind's ultimate problem, this does not mean that he soft peddles or is unconcerned about evil; quite the contrary. In Man Is Not Alone, a book emphasizing the reality of God's presence, published in 1951, well before the appearance of a formal "Holocaust theology," Heschel composes a prose poem that appears as Chapter 9 titled, "The Hiding God." It begins:

For us, contemporaries and survivors of history's most terrible horrors, it is impossible to meditate about the compassion of God without asking:
Where is God?⁵⁴

⁵¹Heschel, "Confusion of Good and Evil," 135.

⁵²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 376.

⁵³Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Children and Youth," in The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 48.

⁵⁴Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 151.

Elsewhere, like the biblical prophets who were his example, Heschel demonstrates a heightened sense of evil and an awareness of the disturbing signs of his times. He writes:

This essential predicament of man has assumed a peculiar urgency in our time, living as we do in a civilization where factories were established in order to exterminate men, women, and children; where soap was made of human flesh.⁵⁵

In a poignant and prophetic speech given to a group of Quakers in Frankfurt, Germany in 1938, only months before he was forced to leave the country, and later modified for publication in 1943, he boldly names both the poisonous presence of evil and humanity's complicity in allowing it to exist. He states:

Emblazoned over the gates of the world in which we live is the escutcheon of the demons. The mark of Cain in the face of man has come to overshadow the likeness of God. There has never been so much guilt and distress, agony, and terror. At no time has the earth been so soaked with blood. Fellowmen turned out to be evil ghosts, monstrous and weird . . .

Let modern dictatorship not serve as an alibi for our conscience. We have failed to fight *for* right, *for* justice, *for* goodness, as a result we must fight *against* wrong, *against* injustice, *against* evil.⁵⁶

He continues:

Our world seems not unlike a pit of snakes. We did not sink into the pit in 1939, or even in 1933. We had descended into it generations ago, and the snakes have sent their venom into the bloodstream of humanity, gradually paralyzing us, numbing nerve after nerve, dulling our minds, darkening our vision. Good and evil, that once were as real as day and night, have become a blurred mist. In our every-day life we worshipped force, despised compassion, and obeyed no law but our unappeasable appetite. The vision of the sacred has all but died in the soul of man.⁵⁷

Implied in his statement that evil is not humanity's ultimate problem is Heschel's

⁵⁵Heschel, God in Search of Man, 369.

⁵⁶Heschel, Quest for God, 147, 148.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 149.

delineation between *evil* and *evils*. In a sense, he believes that evil is God's problem and that evils are humanity's responsibility. Lurianic Kabbalism and other kabbalistic sources contain variations of the notion not merely that history is "a sphere where good is mixed with evil," but also that within God, where all polarities, dichotomies, and tensions end, both good and evil reside.⁵⁸ There is no human response encompassing enough, no observance profound enough to explain or solve adequately the problem of evil. Heschel emphasizes that humans, by their power alone, are not capable of redeeming the world. "The prophet's answer," says Heschel, aligning himself with his forebears, "is eschatological."⁵⁹ And yet, Heschel insists, redemption cannot be expected to happen "as an act of sheer grace."⁶⁰ Subscribing to a sacred ethics derived from prophetic religion, kabbalistic mysticism, and Hasidism, Heschel maintains that God needs humanity to hasten and actively participate in the world's final redemption. For Heschel, the problem is humankind's relation to God in the sense that whereas a messianic redemption is necessary to resolve the reality of evil, humanity's "task is to make the world worthy of redemption," thus making faith and works the preparation for ultimate redemption.⁶¹ "We do not know how to solve the problem of *evil*," he says, "but we are not exempt from dealing with *evils*."⁶²

Understanding history as the unfolding drama between God and humanity,

⁵⁸Heschel, "Confusion of Good and Evil," 136.

⁵⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 379.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 380.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²*Ibid.*, 377.

Heschel believes that humans, in their presumption, have decided to fashion history “in disregard and defiance of God.”⁶³ The severe result of this “abuse and consequent failure of freedom,” is not that God is silent in the face of evil but rather the evil that God has been silenced.⁶⁴ The folly of understanding the human situation as if God were orchestrating or indifferent to the agony of history, Heschel considers the ultimate scapegoating, “accusing the Invisible though iniquity is ours.”⁶⁵ What have humans done “to make such crimes possible” he asks, and what are humans doing “to make such crimes impossible?”⁶⁶

According to Heschel, the consequence of God’s honoring human freedom even to the point of humanity’s indifference to the divine is that God allows Godself to be displaced, leaving humanity to their own devices. “They are left alone,” he writes, “neither molested by punishment nor assured by indication of help. The divine does not interfere with their actions nor intervene in their conscience.”⁶⁷ Heschel explains:

Man was the first to hide himself from God after having eaten of the forbidden fruit, and is still hiding. The will of God is to be here, manifest and near; but when the doors of this world are slammed on Him, His truth betrayed, His will defied, He withdraws leaving man to himself. God did not depart of His own volition; He was expelled. *God is in exile.*⁶⁸

The predicament facing humankind is not that God is hidden, claims Heschel, but that, as

⁶³Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, 1st Perennial classics ed. (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001; originally published, New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 243 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

⁶⁴Heschel, *Prophets*, 242; and *Man Is Not Alone*, 152

⁶⁵Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 151.

⁶⁶Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 369.

⁶⁷Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 153.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

the prophets would say, God is hiding. In this sense, as opposed to the God-is-dead proponents, or those who suggest God is distant and impassible by nature, God's hiding is "a function not His essence, an act not a permanent state."⁶⁹ It is not that God is obscure nor mean-spirited and playing hard-to-get, but rather that humanity's choice to forsake God ends up concealing God which in turn leads to "the hardening of conscience."⁷⁰ God's desire is to be near. God "is waiting to be disclosed, to be admitted into our lives."⁷¹ "God is less rare than we think," insists Heschel. "When we long for Him, His distance crumbles away."⁷² The paradox, Heschel asserts, is that to sense the fact of God's hiding is actually to disclose God. He states:

Our task is to open our souls to Him, to let Him again enter our deeds. We have been taught the grammar of contact with God; we have been taught by the Baal Shem that His remoteness is an illusion capable of being dispelled by our faith.⁷³

For Heschel, the exile of the divine presence—the *galut ha Shekinah*—is not a metaphor of a human conception but a theological insight from God's perspective.⁷⁴ Evil is not merely a threat. It is also a challenge, an invitation, an opportunity to consecrate ourselves to the fulfillment of God's dream of salvation.⁷⁵ Thus the world and God, human failure and divine graciousness, sin and *mitzvah*, are always held together in one

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., 154.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., 153.

⁷³Ibid., 154.

⁷⁴Kaplan, Holiness in Words, 122.

⁷⁵Heschel, God in Search of Man, 377. See also Kaplan, Holiness in Words, 121.

consciousness. "Two things must always be present to our minds," states Heschel: "God and our own sins" (Psalms 16:8; 51:5).⁷⁶ However, he makes it clear not only that Judaism starts with the wonder of creation not with the notion of evil, but also that it is more *mitzvah-conscious* than *aveirah* or *sin-conscious*.⁷⁷ Between the grace of God and the failure of humanity is the possibility to do the good, the human ability to do the will of God, the capacity to convert needs, and the opportunity to do *mitzvah*. Thus for Jews, life is precious, despair is alien to faith, and this world is not to be disparaged for here we have the opportunity to do God's will. "The mitzvah, the humble single act of serving God, of helping man, of cleansing the self, is our way of dealing with the problem . . . The problem of evil does not vitiate the reality of good."⁷⁸ Heschel states, "The Biblical answer to evil is not the good but the *holy*. It is an attempt to raise man to a higher level of existence, where man is not alone when confronted with evil."⁷⁹ Torah, *teshuva* (return), holy deeds, the sanctification of time, prayer, compassionate acts are examples of ways to thwart evil and to bring God back into the world.

The Failure to be Human

According to Heschel, to describe the predicament of humanity as centered in their relationship to God, which is alternately disrupted and damaged by sin or enhanced and blessed by *mitzvah*, is to say that the fundamental problem and the primary sin is *the failure to be human*. Heschel states: "Man's sin is in his failure to live what he is. Being

⁷⁶Heschel, God in Search of Man, 363-64.

⁷⁷Ibid., 363.

⁷⁸Ibid., 377.

⁷⁹Ibid., 376.

the master of the earth, man forgets that he is servant of God.”⁸⁰ Mindful of the dual drives in persons for evil and for good, mindful also of the challenge inherent in Judaism because of the high view it takes of the nature of the human person, Heschel believes sin is not the necessary result of being human but rather the unfortunate failure to be human in specific instances.⁸¹ At its core, the failure to be human is the failure to use freedom well and responsibly in concrete situations.

The crisis brought on by humanity’s refusal to be who we are is manifested in a variety of ways. The spirit of our age, Heschel argues, is typified by a denial of transcendence, by the refusal and the failure to “celebrate a greatness which surpasses the self.”⁸² The human failure to reciprocate the divine, when the gift of life is so unnecessary, is both humanity’s greatest shame and the source of our deepest anxiety, Heschel maintains. He states:

How embarrassing for man to be the greatest miracle on earth and not to understand it! How embarrassing for man to live in the shadow of greatness and to ignore it, to be a contemporary of God and not to sense it.⁸³

The human predicament can be traced to the incongruity between the sublime mystery and gratuitousness of being and the paucity or absence of the human response. As Heschel sees it, the existential confusion is the result of the fact that human beings have lost awareness of their sacred image, have forgotten that they are a symbol of God: “The

⁸⁰Ibid., 157.

⁸¹“Carl Stern’s Interview with Dr. Heschel,” in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Publishers, 1996), especially 400-04.

⁸²Heschel, “Children and Youth,” 49.

⁸³Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 112.

gravest sin for a Jew is to forget what he represents.”⁸⁴ The consequence of this spiritual amnesia is that humans have lost sight of the preciousness and blessedness of life, have developed a false sense of sovereignty, have become oblivious to ultimate questions, and indifferent to the anguish of creatures and creation.

That people have forgotten their divine origin indicates that at the core of this spiritual crisis is a crisis of identity. Heschel states, “Self-centeredness is the tragic misunderstanding of our destiny and existence.”⁸⁵ The unwillingness to recognize a reality that surpasses the self translates into a self-aggrandizement that hides the deeper reality as grandiosity always does. Ironically, grandiosity signals that human persons have lost the appropriate sense and the authentic source of their genuine nobility, which for Jews is manifested in the Sabbath. Heschel states:

The Sabbath is an embodiment of the belief that all men are equal and that equality of men means the nobility of men. The greatest sin of man is to forget that he is a prince.⁸⁶

Losing sight of their divine likeness means humans inevitably live like something or someone else. Reduced to mere ducklings, humans imprint on that which ultimately denigrates their beings: the frivolous, the titillating, the pretentious, the grandiose, the alluring, the trivial. The privilege and responsibility to be human becomes a missed opportunity.

Again, Heschel is not interested in abstract being. He is concerned about the

⁸⁴Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Earth Is the Lord's: The Inner Life of the Jew in East Europe (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950; reprint Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1995), 109 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

⁸⁵Heschel, God in Search of Man, 399.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 417.

human person *becoming* and *being human* in actual situations. Remember, for Heschel, sin signals not a flaw in human being but a failure in human living. Although Heschel is fully aware of the human predicament and the reality of sin in human existence, his view is unlike the Christian persuasion influenced by Augustine. Heschel maintains that Judaism has a different idea of sin and the nature of humanity. He explains:

Jewish consciousness is not aware that the soul is buried under a curse or trapped by inherited guilt from which it must be saved. The doctrines of the Fall of man and Original Sin never became established tenets in Judaism.⁸⁷

Heschel stresses that in Jewish thought and practice, sin is fundamentally neither an inherent problem that resides in the being or essence of the human person nor an inherent state within which the person exists prior to or apart from human agency. Subscribing to the prophetic world view, he understands sin in this way:

To the prophets, sin is not an ultimate, irreducible or independent condition, but rather a disturbance in the relationships between God and man; it is an adverb not a noun, a condition that can be surmounted by man's return and God's forgiveness.⁸⁸

Heschel bemoans the fact that "the sin of the first man" is "not an original sin, it is a common sin."⁸⁹ For Heschel, sin is neither some unseen inheritance of being nor an abstraction. He states:

Though the Jewish view of life also embraces the profound consciousness of sin, it focuses on sin in a concrete sense, as a personal act committed against the will of a personal Creator.⁹⁰

⁸⁷Heschel, Passion for Truth, 253.

⁸⁸Heschel, Prophets, 295.

⁸⁹Abraham Joshua Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969; reprint, Woodstock, CT, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997), 129 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

⁹⁰Heschel, Passion for Truth, 255.

The polarity of the human person, “the duality of grandeur and insignificance, a relatedness to earth and an affinity with God” does not suggest a contradiction in the *substance* of persons. The problem, Heschel maintains, is not one of essence, but of ethics; not one of being, but one of living. How to live in this world?⁹¹

Heschel laments that it is not only quite possible but quite prevalent for humans to “continue to be without being human.”

One of the most frightening prospects we must face is that this earth may be polluted by a race of beings which though belonging to the race of Homo Sapiens according to biology will be devoid of the qualities by which man is spiritually distinguished from the rest of the organic creatures. To be human we must know what being human means, how to acquire, how to preserve it.⁹²

The Danger of Four Dominant Influences

According to Heschel, the modern denial of transcendence, humanity’s loss of their sense of being a sacred image, the consequent loss of the divine preciousness of human life, and the depreciation of the responsibility that goes along with transcendent dignity, are partially due to the modern expressions of four dominant influences: science, rationalism, technology, and classical Greek philosophy. Heschel asserts that the contemporary predicament is fueled and accentuated by the modern scientific mentality which, when exaggerated, is the nemesis of contemplative consciousness presuming it can explain all reality, and tending to recognize as real only that which is empirically evident. Coupled with this is the vanity of those enamored by modern technology, especially by the false sense of power it perpetuates with its ability to distract humans

⁹¹Ibid., 249.

⁹²Heschel, Who Is Man?, 29.

from issues related to the soul. Heschel believes that “technological progress creates more problems than it solves. Efficiency experts or social engineering will not redeem humanity.”⁹³ In addition, the scientific approach, extreme rationalism, the force of modern technology, and an exclusively Greek way of thinking combine to obscure not only Mystery as the horizon of all reality but mysteries of any kind other than empirical ones which cease to be mysteries as soon as they can be explained. He states:

Reason has often been identified with scientism, but science is unable to give us all the truth about all of life. We are in need of spirit in order to know what to do with science. Science deals with relations among things within the universe, but man is endowed with the concern of the spirit, and spirit deals with the relation between the universe and God. Science seeks the truth about the universe; the spirit seeks the truth that is greater than the universe. Reason’s goal is the exploration and verification of objective relations; religion’s goal is the exploration and verification of ultimate personal relations.⁹⁴

At their worst, when devoid of spirit or misappropriated, the factors mentioned above combine to create a noxious cultural amalgamation that reduces awareness, increases apathy, hinders communion, discourages compassion, and fails to address ultimate concerns that emerge from actual living.⁹⁵

In an age dominated by intellectual power, characterized by continual scientific discoveries and technological advancements, it is easy to be so taken in by the successes of human ingenuity that the self is crowned supreme. Heschel observes, “Some of us may

⁹³Heschel, God in Search of Man, 372.

⁹⁴Ibid, 19. Although Heschel’s concerns regarding science and technology without spirit are still valid, great strides have been made since Heschel’s death in 1972 in the dialogue between theologians and scientists which has proven to be mutually beneficial.

⁹⁵Heschel’s concerns are not so different than those expressed by Mohandas Gandhi who referred to acts of passive violence as the “Seven Blunders” and listed them as follows: “Wealth without work, pleasure without conscience; knowledge without character; commerce without morality; science without humanity; worship without sacrifice; politics without principle.” Gandhi’s grandson, Arun Gandhi, to whom he gave the list in 1947, added an eighth item: rights without responsibility.

find it difficult to believe that God created the world, yet most of us find it even more difficult to act as if man had not created the world.”⁹⁶

It is this “false sense of sovereignty” together with “the fallacy of absolute expediency” that concerns Heschel the most.⁹⁷ Robert G. Goldy in The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America sums up Heschel’s view this way:

For Heschel, modern modes of thinking about God, man, and the world have produced a one-dimensional, half-human being: “callous,” “spiritually stunted,” “barbaric,” and “demonic.” Having eliminated the transcendent and the divine from his thinking, modern man has come to experience the absence of God as an objective part of contemporary history. “Man without God is not human,” since “human existence is existence with God.”⁹⁸

A distinguished philosopher, Heschel’s complaint is not with philosophy per sé. His objection is not with reason or conceptual thinking. He is a conceptual thinker of the highest order.⁹⁹ Instead, Heschel’s complaint is that the history of Western thought has been so dominated by premises that are exclusively Greek. He notes, whereas Thales and Parmenides are sure to be cited in a history of philosophy text, Isaiah, Elijah, Job, and Ecclesiastes are just as certainly nowhere to be found.¹⁰⁰ Heschel maintains that the relationship between philosophy and theology has been one-sided. He states:

⁹⁶Heschel, “Children and Youth,” 49.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Robert G. Goldy, The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 66.

⁹⁹One Heschel interpreter, Lawrence Perlman, argues persuasively that despite the fact that he never wrote a systematic theology, Heschel’s theology, for all its poetic exquisiteness, is, in fact, a highly complex philosophical program whose conceptual coherence is grounded methodologically in Husserlian phenomenology and focused primarily on one theological issue—the idea of revelation, on the divine-human encounter. Lawrence Perlman, Abraham Heschel’s Idea of Revelation (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

¹⁰⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 24.

There is much that philosophy could learn from the Bible. To the philosopher the idea of the good is the most exalted idea. But to the Bible the idea of the good is penultimate; it cannot exist without the holy. The holy is the essence, the good is its expression. Things created in six days He considered good, the seventh day He made *holy*.¹⁰¹

Heschel's conviction is that reason withers without spirit, that without reference to transcendence, philosophy concerns itself with problems as universal issues, whereas religion deals with universal issues as personal problems.¹⁰²

In God in Search of Man, Heschel identifies and contrasts these two competing ways of thinking: the one—Greek-German, philosophical, rationalist, and idealist; the other—Hebraic, biblical, revelatory, and existentialist.¹⁰³ The purpose of the former is to analyze and explain. The purpose of the latter is to purify and sanctify. The philosophical is oriented toward conceptual thinking based on “a minimum of presuppositions,” whereas the biblical is oriented toward situations and “points to a way of understanding the world from the point of view of God.”¹⁰⁴

In an autobiographical statement, Heschel explains how, as a young student in Berlin, despite studying with “erudite and profound scholars,” he became increasingly aware not only of the gulf that separated his views from theirs but also of the fact that his questions could not even be adequately phrased in their Greek-German categories. He writes:

I came with great hunger to the University of Berlin to study philosophy. I looked for a system of thought, for the depth of the spirit, for the meaning of

¹⁰¹Ibid., 17.

¹⁰²Ibid., 4.

¹⁰³Heschel, God in Search of Man, 3-22.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 14; Goldy, Emergence of Jewish Theology, 66-67.

existence. . .

My assumption was: man's dignity consists in his having been created in the likeness of God. My question was: how must man, a being who is in essence the image of God, think, feel and act? To them, religion was a feeling. To me, religion included the insights of the Torah which is a vision of man from the point of view of God. They spoke of God from the point of view of man. To them God was an idea, a postulate of reason. They granted Him that status of being a logical possibility. But to assume that He had existence would have been a crime against epistemology.

The problem to my professors was how to be good. In my ears the question rang: how to be holy. At the time I realized: There is much that philosophy could learn from Jewish life. To the philosophers: the idea of the good was the most exalted idea, the ultimate idea. To Judaism the idea of the good is pen-ultimate. It cannot exist without the holy. The good is the base, the holy is the summit. Man cannot be good unless he strives to be holy.

To have an idea of the good is not the same as living by the insight,
*Blessed is the man who does not forget Thee.*¹⁰⁵

The young Heschel's disappointment lies in his discovery that the dominant and modern philosophical and scientific ways of thinking, are ultimately unsatisfactory if not fraught with danger. They are not able to overcome the crisis that they have helped to create.

Hope lies elsewhere.

Contrary to the view held by many Jews of his day and deemed "heretical" by him, Heschel insists not just that Judaism needs but indeed has a theology. Contrary to the dominant presuppositions of metaphysics upon which Western philosophy is based and according to which it conceives of God, humankind, and the world, Heschel argues that Judaism is a unique way of thinking as well as being and behaving in the world. More so, grounded in the polarity and dialectic characteristic of Jewish thinking and living, Heschel's vision and approach is neither to discard wholesale the Greek rationalist approach nor to suggest that they are in fact identical, but rather to show how the Bible

¹⁰⁵Heschel, Quest for God, 94-95.

offers a coherent philosophical outlook.¹⁰⁶ Heschel wants neither to deny nor to blend into one the profound tensions that exist. He writes:

This unique situation of being exposed to two different powers, to two competing sources of understanding, is one that must not be abandoned. It is precisely that tension, that elliptic thinking which is a source of enrichment to both philosophy and religion.¹⁰⁷

Like his Jewish forebears, Heschel appreciates reason but does not consider human intelligence to be self-sufficient.¹⁰⁸ Religious thinking, at its best, combines reason and spirit, uses reason in the service of spirit. He stresses:

Without reason faith becomes blind. Without reason we would not know how to apply the weight of faith to the concrete issues of living. [But] The worship of reason is arrogance and betrays a lack of faith.¹⁰⁹

As mentioned above, Heschel's deep conviction is that biblical, prophetic religion has been absent by comparison to Greek thinking as a force in the history of Western philosophy. He believes the Bible, its spirit, its way of thinking, its mode of looking at the world, at life, its basic premises about being, about values, about meaning, its ability to raise ultimate questions and its vision of human sanctity, has the potential to rescue civilization.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶Heschel, God in Search of Man, 23; Goldy, Emergence of Jewish Theology, 67-69. Goldy points out that the idea that the Greek and Hebraic modes of thinking are identical is historically represented by Philo, Maimonides, and Hermann Cohen, whereas the view that they are mutually exclusive is represented by Spinoza.

¹⁰⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 13. We should note that Heschel's first two works in English, Man Is Not Alone and God in Search of Man, are philosophical tour de forces that not only utilize "language as metaphor of the ineffable" but also exhibit a conceptual framework that, Edward Kaplan, for one, believes has been insufficiently acknowledged. See Kaplan, Holiness in Words, 45.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹⁰Kaplan, Holiness in Words, 117.

We must therefore not judge religion exclusively from the viewpoint of reason. Religion is not within but beyond the limits of mere reason. Its task is not to compete with reason but to aid us where reason gives only partial aid. Its meaning must be understood in terms *compatible with the sense of the ineffable*.¹¹¹

The profundity of the predicament of human existence requires a response of commensurate insight, a special type of inquiry. Heschel believes that the Bible, as a vehicle of God's presence and as a practical vision for living—not secular philosophy or modern technology or physical science—can provide this viable and substantive response.¹¹² Robert Goldy writes: "For Heschel . . . the situation calls for the creation of a type of Jewish and Christian theology that can re-educate contemporary man in biblical forms of thinking."¹¹³

This new theology, which Heschel distinguishes from conventional theology, is most completely expounded in God in Search of Man. In this book he explains:

The theme of theology is the content of believing. The theme of the present study is the act of believing. Its purpose is to explore the depths of faith, the substratum out of which belief arises, and its method may be called *depth-theology*.¹¹⁴

Unlike conventional theology (religion-as-institution), depth-theology is not as concerned with symbol, ritual, and creed as it is concerned with the presymbolic, the preconceptual, and the pretheological depth of human existence from which faith is born. One of the reasons Heschel has always appealed to Christians and non-believers is because his depth-theology transcends creedal tradition and customs as he lays bare what is involved in religious existence, recovering the primal situations which both precede and

¹¹¹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 20.

¹¹²Kaplan, Holiness in Words, 116, 117.

¹¹³Goldy, Emergence of Jewish Theology, 67.

¹¹⁴Heschel, God in Search of Man, 7.

correspond to theological formulations and the fundamental questions to which religious doctrines intend to be an answer. He writes:

Depth theology seeks to meet the person in moments in which the whole person is involved, in moments which are affected by all a person thinks, feels, and acts. It draws upon that which happens to man in moments of confrontation with ultimate reality. It is in such moments that decisive insights are born. Some of these insights lend themselves to conceptualization, while others seem to overflow the vessels of our conceptual powers.¹¹⁵

Conceptual theology is characterized by dogma, creed, and explanation; depth-theology by mystery, faith, and the ineffable. Conceptual theology is informative, depth-theology is evocative. The former deals with final formulations, the latter deals with inexpressible moments. Conventional theology is derived from abstraction and generalization; depth-theology is grounded in engagement in specific situations. Heschel explains:

The elements of depth-theology are those situations in which the door to ultimate significance is not locked, in which the mystery is not obscured. These elements are acts of wonder and awe, a sense of indebtedness, moments of embarrassment and moments of being that are pregnant with meaning, acts of yearning and luminous moments of insight.¹¹⁶

Heschel makes clear that “the vitality of religion depends upon keeping alive the polarity of doctrine and insight, of dogma and faith, of ritual and response.”¹¹⁷ However, he insists that the codification of faith has been substituted for faith and dogmas have frequently replaced God. The purpose of depth-theology “is not to establish doctrine but to lay bare some roots of our being, stirred by the Ultimate Question. Its theme is faith in

¹¹⁵Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Depth Theology,” in The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays On Human Existence (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 119.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 124.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 121.

status nascendi, the birthpangs of insight.”¹¹⁸

Goldy points out that this theology is no rigid, inflexible traditionalism. It is not divorced from the actual situations that give rise to compelling questions. He notes that for Heschel this way of thinking, rooted in biblical tradition, “must look for agreement with the men of Sinai as well as with the people of Auschwitz.”¹¹⁹ In his book, Who Is Man? Heschel makes clear that this new religious thinking “must prove to be relevant not only in the halls of learning, but to inmates of extermination camps and in the sight of the mushroom of nuclear explosion.”¹²⁰ “Religion,” says Heschel, “is, indeed, little more than a desiccated remnant of a once living reality when reduced to terms and definitions, to codes and catechisms.”¹²¹ This world view and recovered form of thinking, Heschel believes, will also “recover the questions for which the Bible is an answer” and which Heschel deems essential to meaningful human living.¹²²

Human Callousness

Heschel does not lay sole responsibility for the contemporary human predicament on faulty ways of thinking, however. He makes clear that equally responsible for the current crisis is human callousness. “Callousness to the mystery is our greatest obstacle” to faith.¹²³ Callousness, Heschel states, is the root of sin. It is the antithesis of the mystical

¹¹⁸Ibid., 124.

¹¹⁹Goldy, Emergence of Jewish Theology, 66; Heschel, God in Search of Man, 421.

¹²⁰Goldy, Emergence of Jewish Theology, 66-67; Heschel, Who Is Man?, 13-14.

¹²¹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 8.

¹²²Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Religion in a Free Society,” in The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 4.

¹²³Heschel, God in Search of Man, 153.

and prophetic sensibility. It is characterized by presumption, imperviousness, and indifference. He explains:

The normal soul is fit and pliable, open to truth, sensitive to God. But if the people “have eyes, but see not, have ears, but hear not,” it is because of “a stubborn and rebellious heart” (Jer. 5:23). Sin has its cause in the hardness, stiffness, or the stubbornness of heart. To be callous is to be blind to the presence of God in the world, blind to “the glory of His majesty” (Isa. 2:21). Such blindness results in pride, haughtiness, and arrogance.¹²⁴

For Heschel, the essence of the Jewish religion is the awareness of being an object of God’s concern, the awareness of a covenant, and accountability to this divine-human partnership. The human predicament, then, is self-imposed: God’s passionate concern for humanity is not reciprocated by human concern for God. The response to divine pathos, Heschel laments, is the sin of human apathy.

Heschel is not only concerned about the apparent lack of concern for God, but also about the prevalent self-absorption that makes one oblivious to neighbor, unconcerned with the common good, impervious to human suffering, and the anguish of the cosmos. In 1960 he stated, “Our greatest threat is not the atomic bomb. Our greatest threat is the callousness to the suffering of man.”¹²⁵ Elsewhere he identifies “the infamy of the soul” as “the indifference to crime, when committed against others.”¹²⁶ Similar to Raimundo Panikkar, Ronald Rolheiser, and William McNamara’s analyses, Heschel believes this indifference is largely the result of the instrumentalization of life, measuring the worth of the world, human beings, and values purely by utility. He warns that to diminish value to that which is useful, ultimately diminishes humans. The

¹²⁴Heschel, Prophets, 244.

¹²⁵Heschel, “Children and Youth,” 51.

¹²⁶Heschel, Quest for God, 150.

instrumentalization of life, humanity's obsession with power, and the personal and communal degradation this obsession engenders, result in the lack of awareness of the sublime, insensitivity to beauty and grandeur, callousness to the surprise of living, and unfamiliarity with the ecstasy of deeds. Ultimately, this leads to the dehumanization and desecration of human beings, reducing persons to things.¹²⁷ In a "strange inversion" humans cease to live lives marked by indebtedness and instead act as though life were indebted to them.¹²⁸ They ignore what for Heschel is an eternal reality, namely, that something is asked of them. The world becomes a playground to fulfill human needs. All value, human or otherwise, is measured by expediency. Viewing every thing and everyone by asking, "What is it good for?" violates the common good and is good for no one. Experts in technology, specialists in pleasure and plenty, people remain novices in the school of the soul and neophytes in matters of the heart. Absent are human expressions of wonder, awe, reverence, gratitude, praise, compassion, holy deeds, and joy.

The Idolization of Needs and the Failure of Religion

Heschel identifies the idolization of needs as another cause of our contemporary spiritual crisis and a telling sign of the times. He traces our present ailment back to the modern person's inversion of the Bible's central question: from "What does God require of us?" to "What do we demand of God?" Heschel believes that religion's demise originated when humans overcompensated in the struggle for individual emancipation

¹²⁷Heschel, "Children and Youth," 41.

¹²⁸Ibid., 44.

and began placing rights over obligations. Human beings neglect to understand that the greatest human right is the opportunity to fulfill one's human obligation: "our ultimate commitment is our ultimate privilege."¹²⁹

In a consumer society intent on selling people what it just convinced them they need, there is an epidemic of concocted and cherished needs that are "not indigenous to our essence."¹³⁰ Thus, most human craving is misdirected, aimed at artificial needs and "short is the way from need to greed."¹³¹ Heschel writes:

The problem of living begins, in fact, in relation to our own selves, in the handling of our emotional functions, in the way we deal with envy, greed and pride. What is first at stake in the life of man is not the fact of sin, of the wrong and corrupt, but the neutral acts, the needs. Our possessions pose no less a problem than our passions. The primary task, therefore, is not how to deal with the evil, but *how to deal with the neutral*, how to deal with needs.¹³²

That the crisis is spiritual in nature, as Heschel maintains, is the sinful result and failure of religion itself. Among other reasons, religion has failed because humans lost sight of its primary purpose and began to understand it instead as a response to human interests and needs. When religion becomes the disguise for the satisfaction of needs, then needs become holy, and what is worshiped is not God. "To define religion primarily as a quest for personal satisfaction of human need, is to make of it a refined sort of magic."¹³³ The problem, Heschel maintains, is not the lack of religion but the perversion

¹²⁹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 242.

¹³⁰Heschel, "Religion in a Free Society," 6.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 7.

¹³²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 383 (Italics in the original quotation unless otherwise stated).

¹³³Heschel, "Religion in a Free Society," 8.

of it.¹³⁴ He believes that it is the explicit duty of religion “to recall the urgencies, the perpetual emergencies of human existence, the rare cravings of the spirit, the eternal voice of God,” and to provide an environment where ultimate questions can be raised and where religion itself can provide the answers to those questions.¹³⁵ He warns, “The moment we become oblivious to ultimate questions, religion becomes irrelevant, and its crisis sets in.”¹³⁶

By locating the spiritual crisis in the failure of religion, Heschel avoids the tendency among religious demagogues to lay blame elsewhere, instead challenging his own household. He asserts:

It is customary to blame secular science and antireligious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more appropriate to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion, its message is meaningless.¹³⁷

The further consequence of an identity that suffers from spiritual amnesia (where do I come from) or apathy (why should I care) is the trivialization of human existence. The “trouble with religion that has become ‘religion’—institution, dogma, ritual,” is that it vulgarizes faith. The fundamental affront is not the separation of church and state, but of church and God; the separation of religion from God.¹³⁸

¹³⁴Heschel, God in Search of Man, 369.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 372.

¹³⁶Heschel, “Religion in a Free Society,” 4.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹³⁸Heschel, Quest for God, 57.

It is an inherent weakness of religion not to take offense at the segregation of God, to forget that the true sanctuary has no walls. Religion has often suffered from the tendency to become an end in itself, to seclude the holy, to become parochial, self-indulgent, self-seeking, as if the task were not to ennoble human nature but to enhance the power and beauty of its institutions or to enlarge the body of doctrines. It has often done more to canonize prejudices than to wrestle for truth; to petrify the sacred than to sanctify the secular.¹³⁹

The crisis, then, in the world and in institutional religion, is exacerbated by the conversion of needs into ends. In a radical claim rooted in the Jewish mystical tradition, Heschel maintains that religion is rooted not in humanity's need of God but in God's need of humanity. By this he does not mean to imply that there is something lacking in the essence of God, a divine deficiency. Rather, God's need is "a self-imposed concern."¹⁴⁰ God generously chose to make humanity a partner in God's enterprise, a partner in the work of creation and redemption. "This is why human life is holy," says Heschel.¹⁴¹ God is unreservedly committed both to the covenant and to the partner. Therefore, fulfillment of the covenant means that God needs humans as much as humans need God.

In summary, Heschel's conviction is that the human predicament is nothing more and nothing less than the failure to be human. Unmoored from their divine source, humans are directionless and unable to realize their destiny. Having forgotten or ignored who they are, people have lost sight of how to live, how to behave, that is, *how to have* (significant) *being*. To the extent that persons make choices that compromise their humanity, they refuse to be human. To the degree that other persons or unjust structures

¹³⁹Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁴⁰Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 243.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 242-43.

prevent people from having access to their full humanity, they are victims of dehumanization. For Heschel, the question of being is not merely a philosophical exercise but an ultimate concern. Genuine human living is the only true testament of being human. “The greatest problem is not how to continue but how to exalt our existence.”¹⁴² To fail to do so, to be committed to anything less, is to forfeit one’s truest calling and greatest blessing.

Flow of the Argument

In dialogue with the texts surveyed in the following chapter and to the end of formulating a pastoral theology and care rooted in a religious interpretation of human existence and aimed at fostering authentic human living, I will offer an exposition of Heschel’s theological vision. In particular, I will focus on his understanding of the human person and on his interpretation of the meaning and reality of God. Since for Heschel theology and anthropology are so intimately and necessarily intertwined, the method of our examination will be antiphonal in character, the explication of the one playing off and enhancing our understanding of the other and vice versa. Then, in response to the above stated problems, I will develop a mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care inspired by Rabbi Heschel’s work.

To break it down further, in Chapter 2, I will examine the works of a sample of modern spiritual writers and theologians who are concerned about the mystical and prophetic lives in order to bring them into dialogue with Heschel and to enhance our discussion. In Chapter 3, after a biographical sketch of Rabbi Heschel’s life, I will focus

¹⁴²Ibid., 295.

on his understanding of the human person. Key to this exploration will be his notion of the person as polarity and as the image of God. Special attention will be given to his development of specific modes of being human and to the task of human being. Chapter 4 is the first of three chapters that will describe the ways that humans sense, experience, and respond to transcendent hints and to the presence of God. It begins with an explanation of the kabbalistic understanding of God's relation to creation and then explains Heschel's understanding of the twin divine overtures of sublimity and mystery and the corresponding human responses they invoke: wonder and awe. Chapter 5 presents Heschel's understanding of the presence or glory of God and the human reply, faith. I will expound upon what Heschel identifies as the movements within the fluid, indecipherable transition from radical amazement to the life of faith, namely, indebtedness, existential embarrassment, gratefulness, and praise. This chapter will also explicate Heschel's understanding of prayer as a primary expression of faith. Chapter 6 elucidates the central idea of divine pathos, the intense, intimate concern of God for the world and humankind, and the conscious response of human sympathy and the practice of sympathy in action especially understood as *mitzvot* ("commandments" or sacred deeds) and as *tikkun ha olam* (mending the universe) as fundamental ways of putting sympathy into action. The biblical prophets, those who most powerfully experienced and interpreted the pathos of God will act as our guides. Finally, in the last two chapters, as a transposition of Heschel's theologically poetic and prophetic vision and as a work of constructive pastoral theological reflection, I will present a mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral care aimed at cultivating human becoming (*holiness*) and at participating with God in the mending of the world (*redemption*). Chapter 7 will lay out the main features

of a mystical approach to care while Chapter Eight will elucidate a prophetic approach to pastoral care.

I now turn to a review of the works of contemporary theologians and spiritual writers who will serve as dialogue partners with Abraham Heschel.

CHAPTER 2

DIALOGUE PARTNERS

The relationship between the mystical and prophetic or the contemplative and active dimensions of the spiritual life is not a new topic. Christians, for example, have been reflecting upon it since the early Church Fathers wrote homilies and commentaries on the Martha and Mary story in Luke 10:38-42. Devout Jews and Jewish scholars have pondered this relationship even longer. It is stated perhaps most emphatically and poetically by the prophet Micah: “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”¹ Nevertheless, the unique and crucial issues of our time—technological, scientific, theological, ecological, international, ecumenical, and global—and the unprecedented challenges and responsibilities that come with them and the pressures of modern culture, make this conversation more urgent and necessary today than ever before. At stake are not only a holistic spirituality and a pastoral care with integrity but also a healthy humanity and the wellness of the planet.

In this chapter I will survey contemporary literature that addresses either or both the mystical and the prophetic movements of faith in light of the modern ethos. I will discuss representative authors and writings that consider these topics independently or in relationship to one another. These authors and texts will be considered dialogue partners

¹All scripture references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless the passage is contained within a direct quote.

with Abraham Heschel and me. This will aid me in the process of re-imagining and reconstructing pastoral theology and care from a mystical-prophetic perspective. Of course, it is not possible to discuss all the significant articles and books that deal with mysticism or prophecy, but these examples reflect the major theoretical and practical issues involved in clarifying the relationship between the contemplative and active dimensions of faith while contributing to the development of a mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral care.

Because the purpose of this survey is to create a dialogue with the vision and thought of Heschel, who is Jewish, I have chosen representative works of only contemporary Catholic and Protestant theologians.² Among my dialogue partners will be the contemporary Catholic theologians and spiritual writers Raimundo Panikkar, Ronald Rolheiser, William McNamara, and Matthew Fox. Protestant theologians with whom I will engage are Dorothee Söelle, Walter Brueggemann, and Kenneth Leech.³ I will group and discuss these topics under the following three categories: “Recovering the Mystical,” “Integrating the Mystical and the Prophetic,” and “Promoting the Prophetic.” These groupings are meant to enhance the conversation, not to confine or unfairly pigeonhole a particular author. In reality, many of these authors and works could be included in more than one of these categories and I believe that all the authors cited would align

²I use the word “contemporary” to indicate recent or proximate. As of this writing, all but Dorothee Soelle are still living. Soelle died in 2003. (In light of her contribution to the present work, it is worth noting that she died of a heart attack at a protest against U.S. Middle Eastern policy.)

³I have chosen the works and authors mentioned not because they are the most famous or influential but because their positions are especially accessible, clearly stated, representative, and therefore most helpful for the stated purpose of enhancing a creative dialogue. It was more manageable, for example, to review the works of William McNamara on this topic than Thomas Merton, whose essential vision and insights McNamara shares, but whose corpus is too extensive to do it justice here. Although not systematically reviewed in this chapter, his insights as well as those of others will be utilized when helpful to the goal and purpose of this project.

themselves with my basic premise of this dissertation: that an intentional, conscious, and healthy relationship between the mystical and prophetic or contemplative and active dimensions of faith is necessary for a spirituality to be vital, authentic, relevant, and liberating. For a pastoral theology and care to be equally so, it also must attend to and promote this relationship.

Recovering the Mystical

There are a number of spiritual writers who have devoted themselves to the recovery of the mystical or contemplative dimension of faith. They attribute various destructive manifestations of the contemporary human situation, especially in the West, to the loss of a contemplative attitude. In a seminal article titled, "The Contemplative Mood: A Challenge to Modernity," later included in his anthology, Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility,⁴ Raimon Panikkar argues that a contemplative or mystical orientation to life radically challenges some of the cherished and guiding principles of modern Western society.⁵ Characterizing this orientation as stressing "spontaneity, desirelessness, delight in the momentary, indifference to wealth, prestige [and] success,"⁶ Panikkar highlights one trait that best captures the essence of the Contemplative Mood. He states:

Contemplation is something definite, something which has to do with the very end of life and is not a means to anything else. A contemplative act is done for its own sake. It rests on itself. Contemplation cannot be manipulated in order to gain

⁴Raimon Panikkar, Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3-19.

⁵For Panikkar, the contemplative and the mystic are one and the same. He uses the terms contemplation and mysticism, and contemplative and mystical, interchangeably, as will I.

⁶Panikkar, Invisible Harmony, 3.

something else. . . It has no further intentionality.⁷

Panikkar offers five ways that the contemplative life counters the incentives, confronts the assumptions, and threatens the values and trends of modern civilization. According to Panikkar, contemporary society is driven by five primary incentives: the Heavens above for believers, the History ahead for the progressivists, the Labor to be performed for realists, the Conquest of the Big for the intelligent, and the Ambition of Success for everyone.⁸ Although he chooses not to divide the world into “religious” and “secular,” he maintains that these incentives are prevalent in both spheres commonly labeled as such, insisting that “the secular as well as the religious can be sacred and both can be profane.”⁹ Whereas modern technological society emphasizes and celebrates the elsewhere, the later, the result, the greatness of external actions, and confirmation of the majority, Panikkar explains, the Contemplative Mood values the here, the now, the act itself, the hidden or intimate center, and inner peace.

The first of these five points (the Here versus the Elsewhere) challenges a prevalent and dangerous religious attitude “which is all too often satisfied with postponing to another world the real values of life.”¹⁰ What most concerns the mystic is the present reality. “When contemplatives eat, they eat; when they sleep, they sleep; when they pray, they pray, as the masters remind us.”¹¹ For Panikkar, the contemplative

⁷Ibid, 4.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., 5.

¹¹Ibid.

act is essentially a free act, a loving act done for its own sake and not in order to acquire something (e.g. sanctity, enlightenment, perfection), to receive an award (e.g. admiration or adulation), or to attain a reward (e.g. heaven). The contemplative acts *sunder warumbe*, “without a why” as Meister Eckhart would say.¹² “The contemplative,” says Panikkar, “cannot conceive of what is meant by an after-life, as if the life now witnessed were not life, the Life, the thing itself.”¹³

The second point (the Now versus the Later) threatens the modern person’s preoccupation with the future. Panikkar maintains that for the contemplative there is no fundamental difference between heaven above or history ahead. “They are both postponements: you ‘ingress’ into heaven or ‘progress’ into history.”¹⁴ He continues,

Whether it be individualistic capitalism or state capitalism, the traditional belief in heaven or the Marxist belief in history, the difference between a profit which is above and one that lies ahead is one of degree and direction only. The attitudes they encourage are distressingly similar.¹⁵

For modern persons, Panikkar says, contemporary life is “preparation for later, for the time to come.”¹⁶ “Soteriology has become eschatology, sacred as well as profane.”¹⁷ Always rushing toward the “Great Event,” straining toward the goal, the prize, the future, he contends that temporality becomes, at best, a problem to overcome, at worst, an enemy to be defeated. “Acceleration,” notes Panikkar, “is the great discovery of modern

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 9.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 7.

¹⁷Ibid., 8.

science.”¹⁸ Such an orientation, straining toward the ‘not yet,’ is contrary to the

Contemplative Mood. Panikkar stresses:

To the mystic only tempiternal present counts and is experienced as real. The meaning of your life does not rest only on its final achievement, just as the sense of a symphony is not merely in the finale. Each moment is decisive.¹⁹

Rather than view time as a nemesis, the contemplative understands all time as

tempiternal. Panikkar explains:

Tempiternity is neither an everlasting time nor a timeless eternity, but the very soul or core of time as it were . . . [I]t is the discovery of the *irreducibility of the present*, the fullness of time in the now. Tempiternity is timefullness. Contemplation is not interested in the later but in this irreducible *now*. And even when the contemplative is actively engaged in something which concerns the future, the act is performed with such absorbing interest in the present that the action which follows is truly unpredictable.²⁰

The third point (The Act versus the Product) identifies the modern addiction to work and calls into question the assumptions that drive it, namely, that one’s value is determined by one’s usefulness and productivity. One is what one does and as Panikkar points out, “You are worth what your work is worth.”²¹ He continues:

You are real in as much as you are a worker and a producer. There are no other criteria for the authenticity of your work than its results. You will be judged by the results of your works. Grace is an empty word.²²

It is not merely that gratuity has no place in modern society. It is that the motivation for and experience of work is contrary to the contemplative spirit. Panikkar explains:

¹⁸Ibid., 7.

¹⁹Ibid., 8.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 13.

²²Ibid., 10.

The modern technological world has become so complex and demanding that in order to “enjoy its blessings” one must obey its laws. And the first law (your foremost duty) is that you offer a total working dedication to society. Work becomes an end and this end is not the fulfillment of the human being but the satisfaction of its “needs.” The anthropological assumption that Man is a bundle of needs whose satisfaction will automatically bring fulfillment is the underlying myth of the “American Way of life,” now collapsing in the country of its origin but spreading all over the world as the necessary condition for a “successful” technology.²³

Here Panikkar’s assessment of the contemporary American ethos is similar to Heschel’s criticism of modern, institutional religion with its fixation on satisfying individual needs.

Contrary to naive charges of idleness or laziness, what sets contemplatives apart in the face of the “work-duty of modernity” is that they value *working* more than work. It is the act itself that “will have to yield to its own justification, or rather its own meaning” not the end result.²⁴ It is not that contemplatives do not involve themselves in activity directed toward the future. For contemplatives, the future is already hiddenly present in the act itself rather than driving the act. As opposed to “the attitude prevalent in the technological paneconomic ideology,” Panikkar contends that for contemplatives “work is neither punishment, compulsion nor obligation.”²⁵

The fourth point (Intimacy versus Exteriority) challenges the contemporary fascination with the “big” and the “great” where these words denote quality and goodness. In the secular, transcendent, and trivial arenas this bias is evidenced in the modern adulation of empires, corporations, and superpowers, in the celebration of mega-churches, and in the calculated obsession of Super-sized consumerism that brings us

²³Ibid., 11.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 13.

Hummers, breast implants, and Big-Gulp sodas. Panikkar points that when people speak of “great religions” they typically mean the “important ones.” Linguistic imperialism determines which language is a “world language.” He continues:

The very symbol of civilization is the Big City, where the mass media is paramount. The pressure to move even higher up the ladder of importance, power and access; you have to be promoted in order to feel real to yourself, gain self-confidence and inspire confidence in others. Mobility becomes the very sign of your status.²⁶

In opposition to this preferred geometry of the outer, the higher, and the bigger, contemplatives commit themselves to the center within, symbolized in many religions by the heart. This concentration, this movement toward the center that Panikkar calls “the inner poise,” “is such that it does not draw you to the great city, tempt you with greater and greater success, or entice you with power of the big just for the sake of it alone.”²⁷ This movement toward the center represents the choice of substance over volume. Whereas it does not offer notoriety, it brings contentedness. Knowing from experience where this deep contentedness lies, Panikkar believes it will be contemplatives who will go to the villages to practice medicine, who will prefer to settle in the small towns to practice law, and who will welcome smaller jobs so as to have more time for leisure, civic activities, and family.²⁸

The final point (Contentment versus Triumph) “directly questions the prevalent anthropological idea that human fulfillment entails the victory of one over others so that

²⁶Ibid., 15.

²⁷Ibid., 13-14.

²⁸Ibid., 15.

victims are the necessary condition for one's sense of achievement."²⁹ Panikkar acknowledges the innate human desire and need to achieve something, to realize dormant possibilities, and to actualize potentialities. He believes, however, that "our thirst to discover the core of ourselves and of the world, the 'heart' and 'center' of the mystic," is easily distracted and co-opted by another force which draws us toward "the almost irresistible thrust for fame, prestige, [and] power."³⁰ Ironically, as modern persons seek to gain the acceptance and admiration of others, they must foster at least a subtle fear from them as well, otherwise achievement of success is jeopardized. In a competitive society that measures success by the number of people we have defeated, and rewards it with recognition, financial power, and economic freedom, fulfillment masquerades as objectified achievements.³¹ In contrast to the ideology and practice of triumph, contemplatives value personal contentment, awakening to a responsibility to others, and interdependence. For contemplatives, "the way and goal are fused."³²

In addition to this synopsis, I offer a few cautionary comments. First, although Panikkar does refer throughout to contemplation and the contemplative act, titling the article and using the term "the contemplative mood" is an unfortunate choice of words to describe what he has in mind. The word "mood" tends to suggest emotional variability as in "mood swings." The contemplative spirit, attitude, way or engagement would be more accurate and helpful descriptions of this way of being in the world.

²⁹Ibid., 5.

³⁰Ibid., 16.

³¹Ibid., 17.

³²Ibid., 19.

Second, even if we concede Panikkar's sense that modern persons may not be driven by the reward of heaven or the punishment of hell as were people before, much religion still promotes, intentionally or unintentionally, a spirituality that is incentive-based. Religion that is no longer driven by fear of damnation is often reduced to nothing more than religion as the satisfaction of personal needs, as Heschel contends, if not religion as the source of prosperity.

Thirdly, whereas Panikkar mentions on more than one occasion that authentic contemplation should not be confused with narcissism or purely aesthetic pleasure of self-complacency and that the "holy indifference" of contemplatives can invite injustice and lead to their own exploitation (he cites as examples the British Empire over the Chinese, Missionaries, etc.), he does not adequately address the dangers of a misguided contemplation nor clearly explain what distinguishes a contemplation with integrity from a false contemplation that is irresponsible.

Another contemporary writer and theologian concerned with the diminishment of contemplation is the Canadian systematic theologian, Ronald Rolheiser. In The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering A Felt Presence of God, Rolheiser develops further Panikkar's thesis.³³ Many of his observations resonate with Heschel's analysis as well. He maintains that we are witnessing an almost unprecedented phenomenon in the history of the West, namely, the emergence of what he calls "the non-contemplative personality."³⁴ Attributing this new development to "an accidental confluence of historical

³³Ronald Rolheiser, The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001.)

³⁴*Ibid.*, 24.

circumstances, a conspiracy of accidents,” Rolheiser argues that the problem is not that God is dead or that God has disappeared or that there is a deliberate and malicious plot against the interior life, but rather that the modern situation is less conducive than in the past to contemplativeness. Succinctly, Rolheiser contends:

God is no longer present in ordinary awareness because ordinary awareness is no longer contemplative. We are living the unexamined life and its price is a practical atheism. . . . [T]his practical atheism is overcome by contemplative awareness. God will be present in ordinary experience when ordinary experience is fully open and not reductionistic.³⁵

This atrophied contemplative faculty, Rolheiser claims, is the distinctive and most dangerous ailment of the modern epic, resulting in a weak intuition of God, that is, a diminished perception of the infinite alongside the finite or an awareness of God’s presence within ordinary human experience.³⁶

Rolheiser attributes the unhappiness that plagues modern society not to the cultural upheaval and social changes that occurred in the last half of the twentieth century but to seeds that were sown centuries ago. The bad fruit of those seeds appear today as narcissism, pragmatism, and unbridled restlessness which distort or reduce ordinary awareness and ultimately militate against contemplative awareness.

Most basically, narcissism adversely affects contemplation because excessively self-centered persons lack awareness of and concern for reality beyond themselves. This translates into both a movement toward excessive privacy that disengages persons from healthy social interaction and into an exaggerated sense of the privatization of material goods whereby persons feel the right to any and all things as their very own. In addition,

³⁵Ibid., 65.

³⁶Ibid., See explanatory note in note 9 , p. 26.

the contemporary expression of narcissism, as seen for example in “the yuppie phenomenon,” has become a culturally accepted worldview and lifestyle in which the “pursuit of excellence and the quality of life are tied to an explicit philosophy of life within which unbridled individualism, selfishness, and idiosyncratic development are unabashedly held up as virtues.”³⁷ Rolheiser points out that in Greek, the word *idios* (idiosyncratic), means ‘a movement towards one’s own.’ What concerns him is a contemporary culture of narcissism whereby the pursuit of excellence and the quality of life (although valid in and of themselves) are reduced to and dependent upon setting oneself against and ultimately above others. This observation is similar to Panikkar’s fifth point: contentment versus triumph. It is this inability to act out of a purpose greater than the “idiosyncratic preference” that Rolheiser sees as so damaging to the contemplative spirit. He writes:

When we are excessively self-preoccupied, we tend to see nothing beyond our own heartaches and problems. Our sense of reality shrinks accordingly and it is not then surprising that we have trouble believing in the reality of God since we have trouble perceiving any reality at all beyond ourselves.³⁸

Like Panikkar, Rolheiser maintains that pragmatism is the accepted *modus operandi* of contemporary culture and that this orientation is so prevalent and strong that it has become almost synonymous with Western life, and especially with American life. Reducing truth to what works and equating what works with what is good, modern pragmatism comes with some costly side-effects that contribute to the impoverishment of our contemplative abilities. Among these debilitating consequences are measuring

³⁷Ibid., 31-32.

³⁸Ibid., 36.

personal worth by what we do, understanding the purpose of human thought to be solely instrumental thus reducing learning to the acquisition of skills rather than for the development of wisdom or learning for learning sake, and venerating the scientific method to the exclusion of other ways of knowing. Because pragmatism exalts practical utility and efficacy, it tends to create an obsession with efficiency which in turn generates busyness which decreases the time, energy, and inclination for contemplation.

Summarizing how pragmatism works against contemplation, Rolheiser writes:

When self-worth depends upon achievement then very few persons are going to spend much time in prayer or contemplation since these are by definition non-utilitarian, pragmatically useless, a waste of time, a time when nothing is accomplished.³⁹

For Rolheiser, the third dominant feature of a non-contemplative culture is an unhealthy restlessness. He writes, “Within our lives there is less ease, and more fever; less peacefulness, and more obsessive activity; less enjoyment, and more excess. These are the telltale signs of unbridled restlessness.”⁴⁰ Rolheiser agrees with the spiritual writer and guide, Henri Nouwen, who stated that “the great paradox of our time is that many of us are busy and bored at the same time.”⁴¹ This paradox of living lives that are full yet unfulfilled, Rolheiser attributes to a culture that is greedy for experiences, impatient and unchaste, and unsupportive of interiority.

The opposite of restfulness, which Rolheiser describes as a form of awareness and a way of being in life, restlessness is marked by a greed for experience that is compulsively not contemplatively driven. He maintains:

³⁹Ibid., 41.

⁴⁰Ibid., 43.

⁴¹Ibid., 50.

We become impatient with every hunger, every ache, and every non-consummated area within our lives and we become convinced that unless every pleasure we yearn for is tasted, we will be unhappy. . . . [W]e are convinced that all lack, all tension, and all unfulfilled yearning is tragic.⁴²

Viewing and experiencing unfulfilled yearning as something negative engenders impatience. Waiting of any kind is an imposition, if not an infringement of our rights. Consequently, our culture is marked by a lack of chastity. Rolheiser finds that patience and chastity are almost a definition of contemplation. He understands chastity not primarily or exclusively as a sexual concept but rather as an approach to life which has to do with "the limits and appropriateness of all experiencing, the sexual included."⁴³ He explains:

To be chaste means to experience things, all things, respectfully and to drink them in only when we are ready for them. We break chastity when we experience anything irreverently or prematurely.⁴⁴

In contemporary Western culture, our tendency to avoid living with tension, to trivialize longing, and to fear incompleteness is no more evident than in the lives of youth and our treatment of them. Given too much too soon, expecting and demanding even more, and exposed prematurely to a variety of experiences, many young people are sadly drained of any great enthusiasm and the great expectations that can only be built up through sublimation, tension and waiting.⁴⁵ Rolheiser muses, is it any wonder so many are so bored, cynical, and fatigued of spirit by the time they are twenty?⁴⁶ He agrees with

⁴²Ibid., 45.

⁴³Ibid., 46-47.

⁴⁴Ibid., 47.

⁴⁵Ibid., 48.

⁴⁶Ibid., 47.

Allan Bloom, the philosopher and cultural critic, who insisted that premature experience is detrimental precisely because it is premature. Paraphrasing Bloom, Rolheiser writes:

The period of nascent yearning is meant precisely for sublimation, in the sense of making sublime, of orientating youthful inclinations and longings toward great love, great art, great achievement.⁴⁷

Because of the busyness that plagues contemporary life, and because the restlessness natural to the human condition tends to be trivialized and undisciplined, Rolheiser maintains the modern person lacks a sense and practice of interiority. Life is lived but not fully experienced. It is not fully experienced because it is hyper-driven, pressured, and thus unexamined and underappreciated. He states: “[O]ur actions no longer issue from a centre within us, but instead, are products of compulsion. We do things and we no longer know why.”⁴⁸

Rolheiser argues that the three contemporary expressions of narcissism, pragmatism, and excessive restlessness are contributing factors and signs of the non-contemplative personality. Non-contemplative persons recognize no dimension of reality beyond the empirical. For them, reality bears no mystique. Therefore, nothing is sacrosanct. Nothing is symbolic. By and large, reality possesses no dimension worthy of us taking our shoes off out of reverence and respect. Little, if anything, is taboo. Besides, even if they did recognize the world as a wedding banquet, Rolheiser suspects, they are too busy to be able to go.⁴⁹

As an antidote to the three ailments explained above and in order for us to recover

⁴⁷Ibid., 48.

⁴⁸Ibid., 50-51.

⁴⁹Ibid., 62.

both the ancient instinct for astonishment⁵⁰ and a felt sense of God's presence, Rolheiser does not recommend any New Age approach but instead proposes three contemplative paths within the Western tradition: the Mystical tradition, the Protestant contemplative tradition, and the Philosophical tradition of theism.⁵¹ He maintains that these three paths within the three major traditions have been neglected and thus forgotten as vital world views and as viable contemplative practices.

The basic prescription of the mystical tradition within Western Christianity is "Wake up!" This tradition (exemplified, for example, by John of the Cross) aims to purify human perception and awareness distorted by narcissism, pragmatism, and restlessness so as to regain our contemplative faculties, restore our sense of wonder, and attain purity of heart. The problem, Rolheiser explains, is that "God is *mystically* present within us and around us, but we are not, save for rare moments, aware of that presence."⁵² In the Christian mystical tradition, purity of heart refers variously to the necessary condition, the divine-gift, and the graced but disciplined effort that enables us to truly see. Mysticism offers a *praxis* by which "the heart correctly disposes itself," and a *theoria* by which the heart is receptive to the presence of God, others, and the cosmic

⁵⁰Rolheiser prefers the word astonishment to amazement. In fact, elsewhere he maintains that Jesus "has a deep suspicion of amazement," and claims not only that in the Gospels amazement is an unfavorable reaction to something but also that it is the opposite of compassion. This is contrary to Heschel's notion of amazement. What Rolheiser means by astonishment is similar to what Rabbi Heschel means by radical amazement. See <http://www.wcr.ab.ca/columns/rolheiser/rolheiserindex2001.shtml> or online at Ronald Rolheiser, "The Mindless Culture of Amazement," *Western Catholic Reporter*, 27 August 2001.

⁵¹Until recently, most Protestants would have been unaware of a contemplative tradition within their tradition or uncomfortable joining the word Protestant with the word contemplative. No doubt, some still would be uncomfortable with it. This descriptive term describing a sensibility within Protestantism is Rolheiser's. He also stresses that this sensibility is no longer limited to Protestants just as the mystical tradition does not nor ever did belong exclusively to Catholics.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 79.

world.⁵³

A Protestant contemplativeness finds its unique expression in its respect for the holiness of God. By holiness, Rolheiser means *otherness, incomprehensibility, beyond concept and imagination* as well as *awesome* and *awe-ful*. He reminds that Protestantism was first a *protest for God*, “a protest against any private agenda or institutional thought or practice that denigrates the absolute freedom and holiness of God.”⁵⁴

Contemplation within the Protestant tradition is characterized by four theological assertions translated into the practice of faith.⁵⁵ The first is to approach God by faith not by understanding. This tradition neither asserts that faith and understanding are polar opposites or enemies nor that faith is merely blind trust. Rolheiser states:

God cannot be understood in concepts and the existence of God cannot be captured imaginatively or even felt in a possessive feeling, but he can be experienced, touched, and undergone. God cannot be *thought*, but God can be *met*.⁵⁶

Faith goes beyond understanding to that “place” of basic trust where the human and divine meet.

The second assertion, an extension of the first claim, is that the task of contemplation is not to make of God “something to be studied, analyzed, conceptualized, figured out, or captured,” but rather “to live in openness to the mystery and presence of

⁵³Ibid., 81.

⁵⁴Ibid., 107.

⁵⁵No doubt many Protestants would identify these assertions as core tenets of Protestantism. My sense is that by situating them within what he calls the Protestant contemplative tradition Rolheiser hopes not only to reinvigorate old theological convictions but more so to illuminate how together they form a worldview and practice that is essentially a contemplative way of life and therefore a much needed antidote to the current cultural malaise.

⁵⁶Ibid., 117.

God,” to celebrate that presence, and to let God be God beyond any preconceived expectations or demands.⁵⁷ Rolheiser explains:

[T]o let God be God means to undergo the presence of God as a tree undergoes the presence of summer. . . . [A] tree is brought to bloom by summer. It does not capture summer, understand summer, conceptualise summer, nor is it even able to project what summer will do to it. It simply *undergoes* summer, acts under its presence.⁵⁸

In other words, God is not met in and through cognitive analysis but is approached by wonder and awe, whereby we live in contemplation.

Third, and another expression of letting God be God, is living in “fear of the Lord” which is not only the beginning of wisdom but also of contemplation. A healthy fear of God means living before God and the rest of reality in such a way that nothing becomes so familiar to us that our minds, hearts, and imaginations are “no longer poised for surprise and astonishment.”⁵⁹ Rooted in a sense of one’s earthiness and creatureliness, fear of God increases our potential for respect, wonder, and awe while decreasing our inclination toward self-inflation, and the misuse or idolization of our freedom.

Finally, the Protestant contemplative tradition is rooted in the theological assertion: faith alone saves. God alone justifies and therefore we are invited “to allow God to give us meaning, significance, uniqueness, and eternal life rather than trying to grasp these for ourselves.”⁶⁰ Contemplation is the antithesis of possessive clutching. Self-justification is the attempt, through our own efforts, to create our own preciousness,

⁵⁷ Ibid., 125, 126.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 125-26.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 127-28.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 118.

guarantee our own significance, validate our own uniqueness, and insure our own immortality. Contemplation recognizes that God is the source and generous giver of these lived truths.

The third approach Rolheiser offers is the philosophical tradition of theism. He argues that classical theism, whose approach is philosophical, abstract, and descriptive, is similar to the mystical tradition, whose approach is religious, pious, and philosophical, and can be viewed as a legitimate contemplative tradition. As such, he suggests the strength of this tradition when viewed as a valid contemplative path is that it recognizes and appropriates the human experience of contingency as an avenue to encounter the presence of God. Classical theism, in response to Nietzsche's madman who comes warning, "God is dead," and accusing, "We have killed him, you and I," signals not that God no longer exists, but rather that God no longer really matters in day-to-day life because humans no longer know how to perceive properly their own secular experience. Engrossed with the marketplace and business as usual, persons take their existence for granted and, when life is no longer a gift, a Giver is no longer necessary.⁶¹

Rolheiser understands classical theism to be a school of thought that invites persons "to contemplate existence in a certain way" not as an attempt to prove the existence of God by some mathematical-type equation that forces belief.⁶² In particular, this way considers how the human person negotiates and makes sense of the experiences of contingency, relativity, transience, and autonomy. Proponents of this way believe that when "viewed within a full hermeneutic of experience" (that is, when lived with a

⁶¹Ibid., 170.

⁶²Ibid., 169.

contemplative awareness) life is never secular. Instead, it yields 'traces of ultimacy', 'rumours of angels', 'hierophanies', 'a divine horizon', and a certain 'contuition of God'.⁶³ Rolheiser reduces the prescriptions of classical theism to a single one:

*"Appropriate your contingency!"*⁶⁴ Recalling the scene in Luke's gospel where Jesus, unrecognized, accompanies two companions along the road to Emmaus, Rolheiser summarizes:

Classical theism, as a contemplative tradition, invites us to recognize God in the experience of being gifted (for that is what contingency means). When we see our lives correctly, we see that all is gift. If we appropriate this, then our eyes will be opened and we will recognize that God has been walking on the road with us all along.⁶⁵

Rolheiser insists the only adequate response to the trinity of woes described above that cloud the contemporary consciousness and conscience is purity of heart which requires that we live in a certain way, that is, contemplatively. The mystical way teaches how to move beyond ourselves, the Protestant tradition encourages submission to the Holy, and classical theism emphasizes that human freedom brings with it the propensity for obedience to and worship of some absolute.⁶⁶

By way of a conclusion to his cultural critique and call for the recovery of a contemplative vision and way of life, Rolheiser offers some concrete ideas toward developing a contemplative praxis. These comments will be taken up in Chapter Seven of this work.

⁶³Ibid., 144.

⁶⁴Ibid., 169.

⁶⁵Ibid., 170.

⁶⁶Ibid., 188-89, 169.

No contemporary author or theologian has devoted more energy and attention to the recovery of the contemplative life for a longer period of time than the American Discalced Carmelite monk, William McNamara. Clearly familiar with and an admirer of Rabbi Heschel's work, his theological vision and commitments show more of an affinity with Heschel than those of any other Christian author writing today with the exception of Matthew Fox. Rooted in the Carmelite spirit of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila and influenced by his contemporary, Thomas Merton, McNamara requested and received a mandate in 1960 from Pope John XXIII to found a small, Roman Catholic, ecumenical, monastic community of men and women committed to creating a more viable and authentic form of monasticism and lay-contemplative life. To date, all of McNamara's writings are an attempt, on the one hand, to offer a vital spirituality for what he considers a bored, narcissistic, overly rationalistic society, and, on the other hand, to offer an alternative to religious structures, communities, and movements that are so superficial or soporific that they have lost their capacity "to provide an authentic mystical experience" capable of transforming not only individual lives but also society as well.⁶⁷

McNamara has written many books and numerous articles. His corpus includes five primary texts. As with Heschel, McNamara's titles are dense theological assertions that reveal a specific spiritual orientation. In chronological order these books are: The Art of Being Human (1962), The Human Adventure: Contemplation for Everyman (1974), Mystical Passion: Spirituality for a Bored Society (1977), Christian Mysticism: The Art of the Inner Way (1981), and Earthy Mysticism: Contemplation and the Life of

⁶⁷William McNamara, Earthy Mysticism: Contemplation and the Life of Passionate Presence (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1983), 69.

Passionate Presence (1983).⁶⁸ Because his works overlap thematically and tend to be a restatement and intensification of the same key issues, I will not review his work book by book. Instead I will lift up the significant points in these texts that together help to spell out McNamara's primary concern: "to foster the spirit of mystical contemplation . . . so that our political, social, economic, and domestic existence is inspired by it."⁶⁹

All the features of McNamara's mature and finished oeuvre are present, at least latently, in his earliest writings. Beginning with The Art of Being Human published in 1962, McNamara puts forth a religious view of and approach to life which he refers to as Christian humanism. By this he means the God-given and Christ-mediated opportunity and the grace-filled human response to cultivate and aim for the highest accomplishment of one's humanity. Similar to Heschel's thesis, as we will see, in Who Is Man?,

McNamara states:

We are not born human. We are born with the primitive, shapeless stuff of humanity. It takes colossal and consistent effort to become really human. It demands, most of all divine favor.⁷⁰

Following both Heschel and Merton's lead, McNamara believes the religious life *is* the deeply human life and that the human life, when lived fully, *is* the religious life. When we fail to be truly religious, when we fail to be pious (as Heschel would say) or saints (as Merton would say), it is not because we are too human, but rather because we

⁶⁸William McNamara, The Art of Being Human (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962); The Human Adventure: Contemplation for Everyman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974); Mystical Passion: Spirituality for a Bored Society (New York: Paulist Press, 1977); Christian Mysticism: The Art of the Inner Way (Rockport, MA: Element, 1981); Earthy Mysticism. McNamara, who now is in his 90's, continues to write but mainly articles and revisions of his earlier books.

⁶⁹McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 3.

⁷⁰McNamara, Art of Being Human, 30.

are not human enough.⁷¹ This is what McNamara means when he says, “the sanctifying process is a humanizing process” since the only true way to fulfill the purpose of life—to give glory and honor to God—is “by being human, by becoming as human as possible.”⁷²

As he expounds in The Human Adventure, McNamara believes that this “divine favor” that enables humanization requires and comes in the form of a mediator, specifically, Jesus Christ. For McNamara, Jesus is singular not only because he is “the supreme and most complete revelation of religious truth, of love, of the Godhead,” but also because he is fully and uniquely human.⁷³ Christ is the unequaled “God-centered Man,” radically mystical. That is, he is the human person most “perfectly attuned to the divine life.”⁷⁴ Jesus’ attunement is the reason he is human not the evidence that he is divine. For McNamara, “Christ is the origin and source as well as the supreme instance of humanism.”⁷⁵ He makes humanization possible and shows us how to become human.

In conjunction with McNamara’s belief that the religious life is the *human life* wholeheartedly lived and that Jesus is the Model and Exemplar is his conviction that the deeply human and authentically Christian life is necessarily the *mystical life*. He writes: “The mystical experience is the deepest of all experiences of the deepest of all facts.

⁷¹Ibid., 16. Although not noted, this section in McNamara is clearly influenced by chapters in Thomas Merton’s Seeds of Contemplation later revised and published as New Seeds of Contemplation.

⁷²Ibid., 17, 16. This view, minus the Christological emphasis, of course, is the underlying premise of Heschel’s Who Is Man?

⁷³McNamara, Human Adventure, 183.

⁷⁴McNamara, Being Human, 34. This idea is developed more fully by Johannes Baptist Metz, Poverty of Spirit (New York: Paulist Press, 1968; reprint, 1998).

⁷⁵McNamara, Being Human, 11.

Another word for it, in the fullest sense of this word, is *contemplation*.⁷⁶ Therefore the thoroughly Christian and contemplative person is one who not only recognizes and affirms the fact of the Incarnation—"the most factual and concrete instance of being possible—but more importantly assimilates this divine-human facticity into the depths of his being and into all the possible ramifications of his being-in-the-world."⁷⁷ In essence, McNamara understands Jesus to be the epitome and embodiment of the divine pathos that is central to Heschel's understanding of both God and humankind. Mysticism is the fullest possible response to the fullest expression of God's pathos as manifested in the mystery of the Incarnation. Borrowing from Heschel, McNamara states:

That is what contemplation is: God, out of *divine pathos*, takes the initiative and calls man by name and solicits his *sym-pathos*, his co-operation, and his presence. And contemplative man lives life fully by being, above all other things, alive to God.⁷⁸

Mysticism is a way of being in relationship to God and a way of being in the world that is made possible by divine initiative and is most fully exemplified in the mutual presence within the mystery of the Incarnation: God alive to Christ and Christ alive to God.

According to McNamara, "The world is divided into those who are asleep, living apathetically in the shallows, and those who are awake and enlivened by faith."⁷⁹ It is the

⁷⁶McNamara, Human Adventure, 129. In his first two books, The Art of Being Human and Human Adventure, McNamara uses the term "contemplation." In his last three books, Mystical Passion, Christian Mysticism, and Earthy Mysticism, McNamara prefers to use the term "mysticism" although he states that these two terms are "essentially the same." When referring to McNamara's work I will use the terms interchangeably as well. At times I will use the term "mystical contemplation," again as does McNamara, to accentuate a contemplation, that although earthy, is fundamentally religious in its origin, nature and orientation, and therefore is more than the apex of a purely intellectual vision.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., 16.

⁷⁹McNamara, Christian Mysticism, xvi, 110.

mystically contemplative person who is most awake, attuned, and alive both to divine life and to human life where the divine-human rendezvous occurs. If we live fully alive to God, then our primary obligation and vocation, McNamara insists, must be to become contemplatives, to be mystics.⁸⁰ Mystical contemplation, McNamara maintains, is the supreme activity in the humanizing process. It both sanctifies and humanizes and is thus the fullest realization of the art of becoming human.

McNamara makes clear throughout his works that contemplation is not a technique or a method. By contemplation and mysticism McNamara means more than a non-discursive type of prayer. "Contemplation is the central human act that puts us perceptively and lovingly in touch with the innermost reality of everything because it is a simple intuition of the truth."⁸¹ Contemplation is the way of union with God. The Incarnation, according to McNamara, establishes for us, once and for all, the *givenness* of union with God. He writes:

We cannot strive aggressively to possess God, nor can we earn or deserve union with God. The spiritual life is the affirmation, appreciation, and realization of the union we already enjoy. *Yes*, we say, and *amen* with our whole lives to the pathos and agape of God.⁸²

There is no neat and tidy program for mystics. Contemplation is the way of artless naiveté involving an intuitive, experiential grasp of reality motivated by and aimed at love. "The only way to know God is by experience: the way the lover knows the beloved, the spouse knows the spouse, the friend knows the friend, and the wise adventurer knows

⁸⁰Those whom McNamara describes and calls contemplatives or mystics, Heschel refers to as "pious" in *Man Is Not Alone*, 273-96.

⁸¹McNamara, *Human Adventure*, 9.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 23.

life. There is no other way”⁸³ “A mystic,” explains McNamara, “is one who knows God by experience”⁸⁴

Lest we misunderstand, McNamara stresses that the contemplative life is not anti-intellectual—quite the opposite. His first broad recommendation for developing the art of contemplation is to develop “an honest-to-goodness, down-to-earth intellectual life.”⁸⁵ He maintains that “the intellectual life is the first step toward contemplation” but is careful to add that a good criterion for the kind of intellectual life contemplation requires is whether “the love it generates becomes more important than the problems you are trying to solve or dissolve.”⁸⁶ For the mystic, the academic life is intended to “habituate you to *wisdom*: literally, a taste for the right things; ultimately, a taste for God.”⁸⁷ In the contemplative life, affectivity and rationality are not opposed but joined in three fundamental human responses to a diaphanous world: “perceptive appreciation of things and their significance, a love participation in their mystery, and a long-view interpretation of their meaning.”⁸⁸

McNamara emphasizes that the “mystical *life* is the same as mystical *experience* (singular) but not the same as mystical *experiences* (plural).⁸⁹ By the former he means

⁸³Ibid., 30.

⁸⁴McNamara, Art of Being Human, 18.

⁸⁵McNamara, Human Adventure, 10.

⁸⁶Ibid., 11.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid., 27. See 27-43.

⁸⁹McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 12.

“the whole range of the self’s active relationship with the other.”⁹⁰ He challenges other misconceptions about mysticism when he asserts that mysticism is not escapism or a pain-killer. It is rather that which puts us most in touch with the world, evoking, on the one hand, wonder and awe, while on the other hand, awakening anguish and concern. He states, “Mystics often suffer more than anyone else because they are so sympathetic and compassionate.”⁹¹ McNamara makes clear that mysticism is not what drug enthusiasts call “tripping out” but rather being fully, that is—humbly, intentionally, gratefully, and compassionately—immersed in the unveiled mystery of reality.⁹² It is not introverted inward torpor or individualistic quietism but active, robust engagement in all spheres of life. It does not refer to the ecstasies of saints, esoteric human behavior, extraordinary psychological phenomenon, or drug-induced transcendence. Mysticism, as McNamara likes to emphasize, is fundamentally, and necessarily for a Christian rooted in the Incarnation, *earthly*. It is lived in the world, in the ordinary, daily mystery and manner of everyday human experience. He maintains, “Mystical experience is far more like a man learning to walk than a man learning to fly.”⁹³ True mystics, McNamara insists, are neither otherworldly nor anti-world. He states:

[They] are basically and essentially great lovers of God and his whole creation. . . . These great mystics are not indifferent but deeply in love with the world. Their love of the world does not diminish but enhances their dynamic, irresistible and burning love of God.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰McNamara, Human Adventure, 29.

⁹¹McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 4.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³McNamara, Human Adventure, 28.

⁹⁴McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 5.

From his earliest work on, McNamara insists that in contrast to forms of Christian piety that have encouraged withdrawal from the world and from others, “a sort of dignified, spiritual egotism, an indifference to the suffering of the world and man, a cultivation of a plot of spiritual ground in the suburbs of reality,”⁹⁵ that Christian humanism, thoroughly grounded in the incarnation and unabashedly mystical, must neither flee from nor hate the world but enter into it to transform it with redemptive, healing love.

Mysticism, McNamara stresses, is *existential presence*, understood as the fundamental response of human aliveness—aliveness to God “from whom all blessings flow,” and aliveness in God toward the world and all reality. McNamara explains:

To engage in the natural art of contemplation is to look long and steady, leisurely and lovingly at any thing—a tree, a child, a pear, a kitten, a hippopotamus, and really “see” the whole of it; not to steal an idea of it, but to know it by experience, a pure intuition born of love. This is not an aggressive act but gratuitous. Being discloses its hidden secrets as we look, wait, wonder, and stand in awe of it—not inquisitively but receptively. The mystic—that is, the contemplative—is never utilitarian or Machiavellian, greedily trying to get something out of everything. He simply stands before being, before the world, before the universe, before another human being, a plant, an animal. He enjoys it and leaves himself wide open to its revelation, to its disclosures of mystery, of truth, of love.⁹⁶

Mystics are those who see all reality against the background of eternity and therefore see all things as infused with and reflective of the love and presence of God. What distinguishes contemplatives is not merely that they “take a long loving look at the real,”⁹⁷ but that they are responsive as well as receptive. “All we can do is respond.”⁹⁸ In

⁹⁵Ibid., 39.

⁹⁶Ibid., 7.

⁹⁷McNamara, *Human Adventure*, 27.

⁹⁸Ibid., 29.

other words, characterized by humility and openness, they are persons animated by “religious feeling.”⁹⁹ By religious feeling, as mentioned earlier, McNamara means not mere affect but rather the engagement of the total self with the transcendent reality of the object thus “actuating what we are as persons” thus making a particular experience intrinsically and not just extrinsically religious.¹⁰⁰ Developing this thought further, McNamara quotes Charles Davis:

Religious feeling is the arousal of our personal being—our intelligent and bodily, spiritual and material selves—in what is, though variously mediated, a direct relation to transcendent reality. Religious feeling is constitutive of every truly personal religious experience, because without it religious responses are reduced to words, gestures, attitudes borrowed from others and repeated without personal involvement.¹⁰¹

The fruits of the religious feeling aroused in, shared by, and characteristic of the mystic (as we will see in Heschel’s theological formulation) are wonder and awe, honor and glory, gratefulness and faith, and finally, celebration and compassion. Contemplation, understood as a body-soul reaction in which the whole person is engaged¹⁰² in a total response to deepest reality, reminds us that “Christian mystical experience is not the fruit of a direct and systematic effort, but is a gratuitous gift of God.”¹⁰³ Appreciation and awareness of divine gratuity, direct the mystic in and toward the true way and end of

⁹⁹ As persons characterized by their willingness to feel fiercely, McNamara’s mystic is reminiscent of Heschel’s prophet.

¹⁰⁰ McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 12, 17-18.

¹⁰¹ As quoted in Christian Mysticism, 17-18.

¹⁰² McNamara, Art of Being Human, 7.

¹⁰³ McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 16.

contemplation. "The aim of mystical contemplation is love."¹⁰⁴

Even though the mystical life is the highest expression of human living, McNamara insists that it is not the privilege or prerogative of an elitist few. He reiterates, "The mystic is not a special kind of person, but everyone is—or ought to be—a special kind of mystic. Mysticism . . . is not the privilege of a few but an experience everyone of us should know first hand."¹⁰⁵ He states:

The mystical experience should be a *normal* occurrence of a *lively* faith. But the average man's life is so paltry and his faith so weak that mystical experience is in fact quite rare. This is deplorable. The first duty of the Church is to correct this dehumanized and desperate state of affairs.¹⁰⁶

The contemporary human dilemma, McNamara laments, is that despite the fact that human persons are naturally contemplative their "mystical powers, left unexercised for so long are seriously atrophied."¹⁰⁷ He writes:

I think I can trace most, if not all, of the evils of our day to superficiality on all levels of existence; and this vapidness is due to the absence of contemplation. . . . The inevitable consequence was the dehumanization of [our] individual condition and [our] social history. We are now reaping the barren results of that bad seed.¹⁰⁸

Although mysticism is requisite for the art of being human, the world is an increasingly dehumanized place to live rendering contemplation rare and thus humanization more difficult. McNamara describes our current situation as a "mystical or spiritual crisis" and

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁵McNamara, Earthy Mysticism, ix.

¹⁰⁶McNamara, Human Adventure, 129. Although McNamara believes that contemplation is for everyone, he notes that phenomenally, "not everyone is mystical to the same degree."

¹⁰⁷McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 22.

¹⁰⁸McNamara, Human Adventure, 9.

as a “crisis in contemplation.”¹⁰⁹ The consequences, he maintains, are serious. He writes:

The frenzied tempo of Sammy running, the waist-high culture of our schizoid society, the disintegration of education, the loss of our roots in nature and in home life, the loss of symbols, of community life, of integrated personalities, of uproariously happy people, the degradation of sex and matter (air and water pollution and the rape of the land)—these characteristics of the American way of life are far from unrelated. On the contrary, they are manifestations of one central fact: an impoverishment of man’s mystical life.¹¹⁰

In all his books, McNamara not only promotes and presents the mystical life but also elucidates what he believes “kills contemplation and makes the passionate life of Christian mysticism so difficult to enjoy.”¹¹¹ Stated most succinctly, McNamara identifies the main culprits as rationalism, materialism, and romanticism.

Whereas reason is a constitutive dimension of an earthy mysticism, rationalism is its nemesis. McNamara identifies rationalism by quoting G. K. Chesterton’s pithy statement: “The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.”¹¹² Like Heschel, McNamara insists that contemporary humanity is “inordinately impressed with the scientific method” and has mistakenly taken one legitimate function of the mind and elevated it to the supreme if not

¹⁰⁹McNamara, *Christian Mysticism*, 21. In his book, *Human Adventure*, McNamara recounts how during the time of the Second Vatican Council he bumped into Rabbi Heschel on the streets of New York City. The Rabbi invited the monk home and they spent a few hours together. While talking, Heschel apologized for his sad mood. When the Catholic monk asked the Jewish Rabbi why he was so sad, Heschel responded: “My morning prayer.” “What were you praying about?” asked McNamara. “Your council,” replied Heschel. “Why did that make you sad?” McNamara asked. Heschel answered the question with his own question: “Father, how many of your bishops gathered at the council are contemplative?” McNamara quips: “Then I got sad.”

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 21-22.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

sole manner of human engagement.¹¹³ Again, quoting Chesterton, he maintains that unlike the poet or the mystic “who accepts everything as a gift from God and basks leisurely in the mystery of the ineffable Being . . . the rest of us try insanely to bulldoze our way rationally into the secret of being, ruthlessly tearing the world to shreds in our frantic foolish effort to label everything in neat tidy categories that fit into our prefabricated logical framework.”¹¹⁴

Rationalism personified is the name for reason run amok, reason so impressed with its own intellectual prowess that it inevitably seeks to manipulate, dominate, and possess. Rationalism is the antithesis of contemplation and “thwarts the enjoyment of the fullness of humanity.”¹¹⁵ McNamara explains, “The substitution of mental concepts for living experience keeps the exigencies of life at a safe distance.”¹¹⁶ Rationalism discourages feeling and separates humans from their feelings. He offers this comparison:

What American economy did to the Indians, rationalism has done to us. It requires us to be so detached from the object of our perception that both we and the perceived objects are reduced to lifeless abstractions. Such a cerebral approach to reality precludes the contact and involvement we need to live deeply and fully.¹¹⁷

The most serious difference between rationalism and contemplation, McNamara insists, is evidenced in the shift from knowledge as communion to knowledge as possession and it is within religion itself, he laments, that this tragic change is most

¹¹³Ibid., 29.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 27-28.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 29.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 30.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

noticeable and most costly. He asserts, "It is not enough to know about God, we must know him in the flesh, in the intimate and experiential contact that comes with communion, and in no other way."¹¹⁸ Creed, dogmatic propositions, formulas of the faith, carefully possessed orthodoxies, dutifully practiced techniques, and conceptual abstractions, have displaced the divine-human encounter as central.¹¹⁹ The loss of contemplation results in the loss of communion.

Another reason contemplation is in jeopardy is due to materialism. Literally, the materialist is the one who "regards matter as primary and ultimate reality and spirit as secondary and incidental."¹²⁰ Modern day American materialism is characterized by upward mobility, unchecked consumerism, acquisitiveness and greed, and an obsession with keeping-up-with-the-Joneses, all of which are fueled by the mass media's allegiance to its propagandist motto: more is better. Whereas rationalism sabotages communion by understanding knowledge as possession, materialism subverts communion by reducing everything (and everyone) to a potential possession. The contemplative sees all as Thine; the materialist sees all as potentially Mine. The contemplative is motivated by giving; the materialist by getting.

Two ways that materialism thwarts contemplation is by decreasing the capacity for leisure and by activating what McNamara calls "the nothing neurosis."¹²¹ Despite the American economic system, technological advancements, and a higher standard of living

¹¹⁸Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 33.

¹²⁰McNamara, Human Adventure, 182.

¹²¹McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 95-104.

that in theory should make leisure more possible, contemporary American culture indicates a basic incapacity for real leisure. Co-opted by materialism and its kin, utilitarianism, leisure bears less and less resemblance to holy repose, understood as the contemplation of the good, and instead becomes “merely the interim between the acts of the working life” and an opportunity for a marketing system to convert wants into needs.¹²² Preoccupation with business inevitably produces compulsive busyness which is the antithesis of the receptive stillness that marks contemplation. The result is a society obsessed with entertaining and amusing itself but devoid of true enjoyment and absent of real celebration.¹²³ Joy, McNamara maintains, is “the echo of God’s presence,” celebration is “the soul of leisure” and “the secret, the source, and the central expression of the mystical life.”¹²⁴

As a contemporary condition contrary to mysticism, materialism is the result of giving ultimate meaning to things that are unworthy of our total self-investment. Leaning on John of the Cross, McNamara writes, “Unless you are detached from everything that is not God, you cannot belong to God.”¹²⁵ When the things we have invested ourselves in “are deprived of meaning, we are thrust into an intolerable form of life-failure.”¹²⁶ Thus, despite the apparent advantages that come with materialism, McNamara claims boredom and ennui are two costly results of a materialistic society and two deadly signs of a

¹²²McNamara, Art of Being Human, 135.

¹²³See Heschel’s similar assessment in Who is Man?, 114-19.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 136. McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 112.

¹²⁵McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 75.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 95.

culture suffering from a loss of contemplation.

McNamara asserts that the experience of nothingness lies at the heart of all religious traditions and of the whole spiritual life.¹²⁷ It not only is the entrance into the mystic way, but also into mental health and moral freedom.¹²⁸ A sense of one's nothingness is not self-loathing. On the contrary, facing the reality of one's humility, ontological, existential, religious or Christian, leads to wonder and awe not to self-disgust. McNamara clarifies:

My sense of nothingness depends on my sense of being. I will never come to understand, in absolute and ultimate terms, how and why I am not, unless I see how and why I am.¹²⁹

A sense of one's contingency and of one's nothingness, "grows out of contemplation, philosophical or religious, and issues in the fundamental human disposition of humility."¹³⁰ The mystic is characterized by humility, the materialist by hubris.

At a deep, subconscious level, materialism is the attempt to refute one's nothingness, to evade one's absolute dependency, and finally, to deny one's mortality. Contemplating their own nothingness prepares mystics for their death which is viewed as "the final breakthrough in the passionate pilgrimage toward the Absolute."¹³¹ In contrast, materialists are the heroes of a death denying culture. Of course, from a mystical point of view, as McNamara points out, they are tragic heroes as ultimately they discover nothing

¹²⁷Ibid., 75.

¹²⁸Ibid., 82.

¹²⁹Ibid., 77.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid., 88.

on earth completely satisfies them, thus thrusting them into boredom and the meaninglessness of life.¹³²

Closely related to this sense of ennui, meaninglessness, and life-failure, is another adversary of mysticism. In Mystical Passion: Spirituality for a Bored Society, published in 1977, McNamara calls it “pretty poison.”¹³³ It is unclear whether he views this subtle and surreptitious lethality as the cause or the effect of the loss of contemplation, but it is clear he understands them as being mutually sustaining. Pretty poison is a vacuous pseudo-love. It leads to the depreciation of love, both the demeaning of human-for-human love and the desecrating of human-for-God love. The problem, McNamara scolds, is that people are not passionate enough and both the culture and the church have misunderstood the meaning, function, and end of true passion. Since mystics are, above all, great lovers, pretty poison is the ruin of contemplation. It is a deceptive, though banal and superficial, substitution for the real thing. It is dangerous because it is packaged and presented as something good for people when in reality it is deadly. He illuminates this modern malady by citing two examples, one in the culture, and the other in the church, offering a scathing review of Eric Segal’s book, Love Story, and the film that followed by the same title, and a critical examination of Catholic Pentecostalism respectively. Whereas McNamara calls for life and love that are authentically passionate, genuinely earthy and erotic, fully human and truly mystical, Segal’s celebrated characters are in fact selfish and narcissistic, shallow and spoiled, arrogant and vulgar, irreverent toward the other, and wholly devoid of social concern or compassion for others. For passion the

¹³²Ibid., 81-82.

¹³³McNamara, Mystical Passion, 61-83.

culture substitutes—self-absorbed pleasure, for sensual mysticism—sentimental romance, for sexuality—genitality, and for substance—sentimentality. The church, McNamara bemoans, peddles its version of pretty poison as well. Citing Catholic Pentecostalism of the 1970's, he castigates it for being an anemic, inadequate, and side-tracked response to divine passion. Commonly criticized for being too emotional, McNamara maintains it is not emotional enough, merely offering diversionary tactics that teach people how to get close enough to God to be warmed but without being burned by God's consuming fire.¹³⁴ Whether in the culture or in the church, pretty poison is an insipid, tepid substitute for the disciplined wildness and the passionate compassion of the authentic mystic.

Integrating the Mystical and the Prophetic

For more than thirty years, former Dominican priest, Matthew Fox, has argued passionately and persuasively for “uniting mystical awareness with social justice.”¹³⁵ As much as any other theological writer today, Fox shares Heschel's concern for the cultivation of wonder and awe as well as the practice of prophetic compassion. Devoting the bulk of his teaching and writing career to the explication of what he calls creation spirituality,¹³⁶ he makes explicit the necessary and dynamic relationship between the

¹³⁴Ibid., 72.

¹³⁵Matthew Fox, A Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village, Humpty Dumpty and Us (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1979; reprinted as A Spirituality Named Compassion: Uniting Mystical Awareness with Social Justice (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1999).

¹³⁶In addition to the above mentioned book, Fox has developed his creation spirituality in such books as: Prayer: A Radical Response to Life (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2001), originally published in 1972 as On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear; intro. and commentaries to Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation (Garden City, NY.: Doubleday, 1980); Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Parts, Twenty-Six Themes, and Two Questions (Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Company, 1983); The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988); Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991);

mystical and the prophetic dimensions of faith, between what he calls the Via Positiva and the Via Transformativa. Like McNamara, Fox is familiar with and an admirer of Rabbi Heschel. More so, Fox's work is clearly informed by Heschel's work. He quotes him regularly. Creation spirituality is rooted in a Jewish, biblical worldview and way of life (versus a Hellenistic, philosophical approach). Fox especially appropriates Heschel's insights regarding the integral place of radical amazement in the spiritual life and utilizes Heschel's seminal work on the prophets to support his understanding of prophecy, compassion, and justice. He makes even more explicit and develops more systematically than Heschel the relationship between the mystical and prophetic dimensions of life.

Fox maintains that creation spirituality is rooted not only in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, in the Yahwist tradition in Genesis, for example, where we find not science but a fundamental proclamation of faith, but also in the story of the universe as scientists are teaching it today. Lamenting the split between religion and science that occurred in the West in the seventeenth century, Fox writes:

This split has been disastrous for the people: religion has become privatized and science a violent employee of technology, with the result that the people have become alternately bored, violent, lonely, sad, and pessimistic. Above all, the people have become victims—victims of world wars, massive military taxes, needless unemployment, dire conflict between haves and have-nots.¹³⁷

When a civilization lacks a cosmology, he claims, "It is not only cosmically violent, but cosmically lonely and depressed."¹³⁸ Without a meaningful cosmology, mystical

Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh: Lessons for Transforming Evil in Soul and Society (New York: Harmony Books, 1999).

¹³⁷Fox, Original Blessing, 10.

¹³⁸Fox, Coming of the Cosmic Christ, 2.

awareness disappears and compassion dies.¹³⁹ When society lacks awe or mysticism, life is trivialized and when the preciousness and interdependence of life is devalued, then compassion is reduced to pity or feelings of sentimentality. When the mystic is denigrated or denied, as Fox argues they are in our present time, pseudo and ersatz-mysticisms arise in place of authentic, vital mysticism. He states:

A civilization that denies the mystic is no civilization at all. It offers no hope and no adventure, no challenge worthy of sacrifice and joy to its youth or its artists. It offers no festivity, no sabbath, no living ritual to its people. And no deep healing. Such a culture actually promotes negative addictions: drugs, crime, alcohol, consumerism, militarism. It encourages us to seek outside stimulants to provide meaning for life and defense from enemies because it is so woefully out of touch with the *power inside*. It relegates the poor to still greater poverty and the comfortable to an infinite deluge of luxury items, and those in the middle to resentment toward both poor and rich.¹⁴⁰

Fox believes that religion as well as science must let go of its outdated, dualistic paradigms. He also insists that for spirituality to be authentic and for science to be ethical they must be in dialogue with one another. He asserts that “there can be no anthropology without cosmology,” and as we will see in our study of Heschel, there can be no theology without anthropology.¹⁴¹ Extending this idea further, Fox concurs in multiple texts with Heschel’s fundamental understanding of sin as “the refusal of humans to become who we are.”¹⁴² Fox insists a creation story tells us who we are. It awakens awe and wonder that we are here at all, that we exist on this planet among a trillion other galaxies, each with 200 billion stars. It makes us aware of our interconnections with other creatures and

¹³⁹This comment is poignant, as we will see, in light of Heschel’s awareness, appreciation, and personal appropriation of kabbalistic cosmology.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁴¹Fox, *Creation Spirituality*, 13.

¹⁴²See for example, *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh*, 4.

peoples, thus increasing the chances of our being sympathetic, in solidarity, and compassionate.

Creation spirituality places human history, and the history of the life, death, resurrection and second coming of Jesus the Christ, within the history of the cosmos itself. It thereby connects human history and the paschal mystery to the death of Mother Earth (matricide), to the resurrection of the human psyche (mysticism), and to the coming of the Cosmic Christ (a living cosmology) which according to Fox “name the mystery of the divine cycle of death and rebirth and sending of the Spirit in our time.” He believes that “were the human race to believe anew in this mystery a renaissance would surely occur.”¹⁴³

Matthew Fox’s teacher, M.D. Chenu, defines creation spirituality as “a way of life that takes body and body politic, nature and human history, as serious arenas where the Spirit of God is met on the one hand and put into motion on the other.”¹⁴⁴ Creation spirituality is an intentional way of being in the world that begins with the gratuitous blessing and beauty of all life, the interconnectedness of all creation, and ends in the radical response to that life, and the reverencing and protection of all consequential relations, for as Fox asserts, “being is about relation.”¹⁴⁵ He writes:

The Spirit is life, *ruah*, breath, wind. To be spiritual is to be alive, filled with *ruah*, breathing deeply, in touch with the wind. Spirituality is a life-filled path, a spirit-filled way of living.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³Fox, Coming of the Cosmic Christ, 3.

¹⁴⁴M.D. Chenu, “Body and Body Politic in the Creation Spirituality of Thomas Aquinas,” in Western Spirituality: Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes, ed. Matthew Fox (Notre Dame, IN: Fides/Claretian, 1979), 193.

¹⁴⁵Fox, Creation Spirituality, 9.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

According to Fox, creation spirituality derives its meaning from the gift (blessing) that life is, from the awareness of the relatedness and interdependency of all living things, from gratefully enjoying and celebrating life, from sharing life with others, from the willingness to make sacrifices to birth, sustain, honor, and protect life for all, and from acknowledging the Source of life. He explains, “Creation is what the mystic is awakened to and what the prophet fights to sustain.”¹⁴⁷

Stated most succinctly, creation spirituality is about putting *biophilia* (the love of life) first. Echoing Hildegard of Bingen and Thomas Aquinas, Fox insists, “God is life.” Thus, he continues, “and so our response to life constitutes our response to the Life-giver, the Source of Life.”¹⁴⁸

Fox’s complaint with the strain of Christian spirituality dominant in the West the last three hundred years is that it not only does not start with creation but is antagonistic toward it. Ironically, he argues, it has not been oriented *toward* life and therefore has not proven to be life-giving. Instead it began with a negative outlook on the spiritual life by emphasizing sin and redemption and by rejecting the positive values of the present world, of nature, the body, and the senses.¹⁴⁹ Intimately connected to the above, Fox maintains that it has distorted the image of God and has not portrayed God, first and foremost, as the generous Creator who cares intimately and compassionately for creation.

Rather than being a contemporary response—a “new paradigm”—Fox claims that in reality Creation-Centered Spirituality is older than the dominant paradigm which he

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁸ Fox, *Prayer*, xxv.

¹⁴⁹ Bede Griffiths as quoted in Fox, *Sheer Joy*, 517.

calls Fall/Redemption Spirituality.¹⁵⁰ He writes:

Creation spirituality is a tradition: it has a past; it has historical and biblical roots; it boasts a communion of saints. But it is for the most part new to religious believers of our time. And it is utterly new to our culture, which, if it has been touched by religion at all, has been touched by fall/redemption and not creation-centered spirituality.¹⁵¹

Fox understands his work as both a retrieval and a modern translation of an ancient tradition that “has been forgotten almost entirely as religion.” He points out that “it has been kept alive by artists, poets, scientists, feminists, and political prophets, but not by theologians.”¹⁵² By recovering and reinterpreting this tradition for our times, Fox hopes to offer an alternative to the overriding theological and spiritual paradigm.

According to Fox, whereas Fall/Redemption Spirituality is Greek in influence, Creation Spirituality is Hebrew in sensibility. Whereas the former begins with sin, the latter begins with God’s creative energy. The Fall/Redemption approach views life dualistically, considers the spiritual as the immaterial, is suspicious of the body, and denigrates or merely tolerates matter. Creation Spirituality is dialectical, understands the spiritual to be that which is life-giving, honors and celebrates the body, and treats matter as God-made and therefore holy. The former spiritual path tends to be private (God and me). The latter is public (God and us) as well as global and cosmological. The former tradition focuses theologically on the theme of the Fall and humankind’s need for redemption, whereas Fox’s paradigm is centered on the theological theme of creation, on

¹⁵⁰Ibid, xxi. Fox acknowledges that it was M.D. Chenu, his teacher in Paris, who first named for him the distinctions between these two divergent streams of spirituality in the West. Chenu was recommended to Fox by Thomas Merton after Fox sought Merton’s advice.

¹⁵¹Fox, Original Blessing, 12.

¹⁵²Ibid.

its goodness, and on the human responses of gratefulness, enjoyment, and sharing its goodness with others. The Fall/Redemption approach depicts the divine-human relationship vertically with God being up and humankind below, and takes a negative view toward the human person and human history. In contrast, Creation Spirituality looks affirmatively (not naively) and hopefully toward the human person and human history believing that humans can be responsible for creation to the extent that they revere, receive, and share it as gift. In addition, it imagines humankind's relationship to God horizontally and concentrically, understanding God as panentheistic, that is, God is in all and all is in God.¹⁵³

Fox rejects the classical, Western, three-phase description of the spiritual journey which Plotinus, a Neoplatonist philosopher and mystic, identified as purgation, illumination, and union. He maintains that this description is unbiblical (Plotinus did not know the Bible) and inadequate to human experience leaving out, for example, delight, pleasure, creativity, and justice.¹⁵⁴ Fox proposes a schema with four interrelated paths. They are: the Via Positiva, the Via Negativa, the Via Creativa, and the Via Transformativa. He explains:

The Four paths of creation spirituality tell us *what matters*. We are told in

¹⁵³Fox, Prayer, xxi-xxiii. Original Blessing, 316-19. As in any study whose methodology is oriented toward contrast, Fox's proposal is too neat and tidy, often lacks nuance, falls prey to caricature, fails to recognize and name anywhere the two approaches might overlap, and tends to be sweeping in its negative assessment of the Fall/Redemption paradigm. In response to critics who have accused him of his own dualism, painting too stark a contrast between these two traditions, Fox responds: "When it comes to human concepts, there are either/or choices that we must make—a psychology that says, 'The soul makes war with the body,' (fall/redemption, Augustine) and one that says 'The soul loves the body,' (creation spirituality, Eckhart) are not saying the same thing. Only a mushy and basically sentimental mind would say they are of equal value. We must choose. A spirituality is a way, a path. We do not come to two paths in a road and say, out of timidity and fear to make a decision, 'I will go down both roads at once.'" (Original Blessing, 28)

¹⁵⁴Fox, Creation Spirituality, 17.

Path One that awe and delight matter; in Path Two that darkness, suffering, and letting go matter; in Path Three that creativity and imagination matter; and in Path Four that justice and celebration, which add up to compassion, matter.¹⁵⁵

Whereas Plotinus' familiar description begins with the Via Negativa, Fox's Four Paths, which he also calls Four Commandments, begin with the Via Positiva echoing Heschel's contention that wonder and awe are pretheological. He writes:

The creation spirituality journey begins with awe, wonder, and falling in love. The first commandment, the Via Positiva, is that of praise that flows from beholding the awe of being here.¹⁵⁶

In addition, Fox contends that whereas the goal of the former three-path model is contemplation and the turning away from the earth and all that relates to it, the goal of the four paths of creation spirituality is compassion.¹⁵⁷

In Fox's scheme, the Via Positiva and the Via Creativa, are intimately related, just as the Via Negativa and the Via Transformativa, are closely connected. About the relation between the first pair Fox states:

Paths One and Three, the Via Positiva and the Via Creativa are related in a special way because they are both about awe and wonder, delight and beauty. Path One is the delight and wonder engendered by the experience of creation itself; Path Three can evoke delight and wonder *at what humans birth*.¹⁵⁸

About the connection between the other pair, he writes:

Paths Two and Four, the Via Negativa and the Via Transformativa, are also related in a special way because we cannot enter compassion (Path Four) if we have not entered the darkness of suffering and pain (Path

¹⁵⁵Ibid, 17-18.

¹⁵⁶Ibid, 19.

¹⁵⁷Ibid, 17.

¹⁵⁸Fox, Creation Spirituality, 23.

Two). Compassion is often born of a broken heart, and all persons who live fully have their hearts broken—the dark night of the soul is common to us all. The struggle for justice is born of the experience of injustice. . . . Path Four in many respects is a response to the suffering of the world and of the self that we undergo in Path Two. But by the time we arrive at Path Four we are more fully equipped—thanks to the awakened imagination and creativity of Path Three—to respond to suffering not just with anger but with creative, effective works that truly heal.¹⁵⁹

Although for Fox, the authentic mystic is the authentic prophet, and vice versa, his creation-centered paradigm envisions Paths One and Three as the mystical, and Paths Two and Four as the prophetic.

Fox defines mysticism in a general way as “our capacity for enjoyment. More precisely, as our search for the beautiful (and its search for us).”¹⁶⁰ This last statement is reminiscent of Heschel and alludes to the fact that the mystical journey begins with openness or nonaction, and is followed by our response to whom or what we find or what or who finds us. Thus, by mysticism Fox means *awe* which is the radical receptivity and the radical response to the mystery and blessing of life and the cosmos. Awe is present actually in all Four Paths, whether as a response to the “isness” of creation and being itself, as an acute sense of the mystery of suffering, as felt in the act of creating, or as experienced in justice obtained and compassion retrieved.¹⁶¹ Leaning on Heschel, Fox understands radical amazement to be not only the antidote for the kind of luxury that engenders self-interest, boredom, and passivity common to “overdeveloped” countries, but also the starting point for an authentic mysticism that brings about a response to the

¹⁵⁹Fox, Christian Spirituality, 25.

¹⁶⁰Fox, Prayer, 93. This last point seems clearly indebted to Heschel.

¹⁶¹Fox, Creation Spirituality, x.

poverty and suffering common to “underdeveloped” countries.¹⁶²

The basic spiritual discipline in creation spirituality is not asceticism but the development of the aesthetic. Whereas Heschel promotes the view that humans are the partner of God in the recreation of the universe, he is somewhat suspicious of the aesthetic or the making of art. He believes that self-expression is not of supreme concern and fears ultimately that in the making of art the risk is that the image may replace the reality itself, especially in the attempt to symbolize God.¹⁶³ In contrast, Fox hopes to recover and activate the aesthetic. In creation spirituality creativity is the apex of each of the Four Paths, whether it is expressed in art as meditation, ritual mourning celebrations, or working to restructure unjust structures. Following the Via Positiva and the Via Negativa, Path Three, the Via Creativa, invites people to put their imaginations and creativity at the service of compassion. To create, then, Fox explains, is not merely about painting a picture or producing an object, but means rather to participate with God in the ongoing co-creation of the universe. In this way the creative process is a unique way to enter into not only our own wonder and pain but also into the anguish of others and the suffering of the universe.¹⁶⁴ Awe and creativity become privileged ways to receive, experience, and appreciate the interconnectedness of all life which in turn engenders compassion.

¹⁶²Fox, Creation Spirituality, xiii-xiv. Although Fox uses the terms “First World” and “Third World” in his book, Creation Spirituality, he does so reluctantly and only with quotation marks, preferring the terms “overdeveloped” and “underdeveloped.” He also emphasizes that there are “Third World” conditions in some “First World” cities and counties. In addition, he makes it clear that he considers the “First World” to be overdeveloped materially but underdeveloped spiritually, whereas he believes the “Third World” is underdeveloped materially but healthier spiritually indicated by their “passion for mystery and history, for beauty and justice.”

¹⁶³Heschel, Quest for God, 117-44.

¹⁶⁴Fox, Creation Spirituality, 21.

Creation spirituality is oriented toward compassion. Fox maintains, “compassion alone can save us and our planet.”¹⁶⁵ The love and appreciation of life (mysticism) evokes compassion and leads to justice-making since “the radical lover moves beyond the world of the personal and psychological.”¹⁶⁶ Fox states, “Justice is the first concern for those who love life.”¹⁶⁷

Fox asserts that justice is the primary and appropriate standard by which the authenticity of mysticism is measured. “The way to encourage authentic mysticism,” he insists, “is to encourage its sister, prophecy.”¹⁶⁸ By prophecy he means the struggle for justice and justice is “the structured struggle to share the pleasure of God’s good earth.”¹⁶⁹ The prophet is the mystic in action.¹⁷⁰ Whereas mysticism refers to our capacity and desire to enjoy (savor) the world, prophecy refers to our capacity and desire to improve (save) the world. Mysticism invites the development of our powers to say “yes” to life. Prophecy invites the development of our capacity to say “no” to the enemies of life. Whereas mysticism involves rooting ourselves into life, prophecy entails uprooting the death-elements in our culture.¹⁷¹ Fox maintains that the surest sign of the transition from adolescence into adulthood is when adolescents sense their vocation and ability to do something to counter life’s enemies.

¹⁶⁵Fox, Coming of the Cosmic Christ, vi.

¹⁶⁶Fox, Prayer, 95.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁶⁹Fox, Coming of the Cosmic Christ, vi.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁷¹Fox, Prayer, 135.

Thus, it is this awakened mysticism, insists Fox, that is the genesis of hope for our world's future and the movement toward liberation since the experience of radical amazement and creativity open persons not only to cosmic wonder but also to cosmic pain.¹⁷² When mystical, the radical lover enjoys and responds gratefully to the blessing and mystery of life. When prophetic, the radical lover becomes indignant at the desecration of life and responds compassionately by performing works of mercy and doing justice.

Dorothee Soelle is another writer devoted to bringing together the mystical and the prophetic. In one of her last books, The Silent Cry, the feminist, activist, and political theologian, examines the relationship between religion and ethics, insisting on the reconnection "between mystical experience and social and political behavior."¹⁷³ To separate these two, she asserts, is dangerous and detrimental to both sides and ultimately empties religion of its substance. Thus, her intention is "to erase the distinction between a mystical *internal* and a political *external*."¹⁷⁴

In this very personal work, Soelle cites Baron von Hugel's three elements of religion—the institutional, intellectual, and mystical—maintaining not only that "religion does not stay alive" without reciprocal relationships among the three, but also noting that it is the mystical "that will not let go of me."¹⁷⁵ In the introduction she writes:

What drew me to mysticism was the dream of finding a form of spirituality that I

¹⁷²Fox, Creation Spirituality, 38.

¹⁷³Dorothee Soelle, The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 1.

was missing in German Protestantism. What I was seeking had to be less dogmatic, less cerebral and encased in words, and less centered on men. It had to be related to experience in a twofold sense of the word: how love for God came about and what consequences it has for life.¹⁷⁶

Reworking a definition of Aquinas and Bonaventure, she understands mysticism as the knowledge of God that comes from experience.¹⁷⁷ Exploring mysticism as the primal religious impulse (“the silent cry”) in all religions, especially as embodied in Christian figures throughout history, she focuses on the mystical element of faith, that is, the love *for* God,¹⁷⁸ and “its political and praxis-oriented actualization that is directed toward the world.”¹⁷⁹ Soelle hopes not only to bring together what often are separated, but also to persuade that the criterion for genuine mysticism is ethics. “What interests me,” she notes, “is how mystics in different ages related to their society and how they behaved in it.”¹⁸⁰ Whatever the particular response, era, or person, whether by Theresa of Avila, Thomas Müntzer, or Daniel Berrigan, she finds a common thread—“all of them lived their mysticism in the repudiation of the values that ruled in their worlds.”¹⁸¹ What they share is both a “Yes” and a “No” to life. As mystics, they have in common “a perception of God drawn from experience,” a sense of “the inner light of being at one with every living thing,” and a rebuttal of “No!” to the world as it currently exists, what she calls

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 2.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 45-46.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 2. Soelle states, “The history of mysticism is a history of the love of God.”

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 3.

¹⁸¹Ibid.

“resistance against the machine of death.”¹⁸² The “No!” of resistance is the necessary partner of the “Yes!” of mysticism in a spirituality that is honest, close to reality, and oriented toward liberation.

Convinced that the trivialization of life is one of “the strongest antimystical forces among us today,” Soelle hopes “to democratize mystical experience, that is, not to understand it as an elitist affair of a few select people.”¹⁸³ To this end, she proposes a mysticism that occurs daily in our midst by examining five “places of mystical experience”: nature, eroticism, suffering, community, and joy. She assures her readers, mysticism is not only possible and accessible to all human beings, but that it is necessary for authentic religion and for the survival of a world infected by globalization, fundamentalism, and individualization. But not just any mysticism will do.

Presenting a mysticism that is multi-religious and ecumenical, cross-cultural as well as counter-cultural, Soelle describes the universal elements of mysticism: union with God, ecstasy, yearning, wonderment, and the language of silence and paradox. Stimulated by the works of Matthew Fox, she develops a mysticism that is creation-centered and concerned about transformation. As does Fox, she questions a mysticism that begins with “purging or purification” (*via negativa*) as put forth in the traditional stages of purgation, illumination, and union rather than beginning with original goodness or blessing (*via positiva*). She also agrees with Fox that the Western tradition of mysticism tends to reduce union with God merely to the relationship of the individual soul with the divine. Connecting union with God to the realities of the world, she writes:

¹⁸²Ibid., 46, 5.

¹⁸³Ibid., 13, 11.

The goal is creation and compassion. Creativity presupposes union with the Creator whose power lives in the oneness with us. Today we understand creativity not only as the transformation of an individual soul but of the world as a whole, in which humans live together. To speak of this *via transformativa* means to embed the mystical project in the context of our life, which is marked by the catastrophe of economic and ecological exploitation.¹⁸⁴

Adapting Fox's four stages, Soelle outlines a contemporary mystical journey by identifying and expounding three "stations on the way of mysticism." They interrelate and overlap. They are: being amazed, letting go, and resisting.

To begin the journey with amazement, Soelle maintains, means "that we set out not as those who seek but as those who have been found."¹⁸⁵ Giving specific acknowledgment in this regard to Heschel, Soelle contends that without "radical amazement" as the origin of being-in-relation, "there is no mystical way that leads to union."¹⁸⁶ She states:

The soul needs amazement, the repeated liberation from custom, viewpoints, and convictions, which, like layers of fat that make us untouchable and insensitive, accumulate around us. What appears obvious is that we need to be touched by the spirit of life and that without amazement and enthusiasm nothing new can begin.¹⁸⁷

However, she also emphasizes that we need to avoid reducing amazement to bliss alone, explaining that there is also "the terrifying, sinister side of wonderment."¹⁸⁸ Without this latter sense, people often take on an air of rational superiority and act as if they owned the world, and for Soelle, "to be able to own and to be amazed are mutually

¹⁸⁴Ibid., 89.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 90.

¹⁸⁶Ibid.

¹⁸⁷Ibid.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

exclusive.”¹⁸⁹

Amazement invites us to a spirituality of relinquishment, whether what we let go of is our unhealthy attachment to ourselves, to our possessions and consumptive behavior, or to our violent ways. In the mysticism of today, Soelle maintains the asceticism of letting go calls for egolessness, possessionlessness, and non-violence.

The final “station” in Soelle’s schema is resistance. She settles on the concept of “resistance” as her focal orientation throughout the book. Her argument moves from a more radical understanding of the “and” between mysticism *and* resistance, making a substantive argument for the necessary and dynamic relationship between mysticism and political action, to the assertion that mysticism *is* resistance, and finally to a call for a mysticism of liberation. Resistance is the link between letting go and liberation. Personal healing and social, economic, political, and ecological liberation require relinquishing ego, property, and violence.

Recovering the Prophetic

A contemporary representative for those committed to promoting the prophetic dimension of faith is the Protestant biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, referred to earlier in Chapter One. I offer here a summary of his 1978 book, The Prophetic Imagination in which he makes a case for the requisite and alternative perspective of the prophets and presents the primary tasks of prophetic ministry. Brueggemann states that “the time may be ripe in the Church for serious consideration of prophecy as a crucial

¹⁸⁹Ibid.

element in ministry.”¹⁹⁰ This statement, the first sentence of the preface, betrays a modesty of character more than a reticence of conviction. Brueggemann argues persuasively and unapologetically for the necessity of the prophetic perspective if present-day believers and communities of faith are to have anything substantive, let alone transformational, to offer both individual persons and ecclesial institutions that are becoming more and more “enculturated to the American ethos of consumerism.”¹⁹¹ He maintains that the internal cause of such enculturation is two mutually sustaining phenomenon: the loss of identity due to the abandonment of the religious tradition and a consumer society that is organized against history, one that depreciates memory and ridicules hope.

The prophet’s message, which is always a creative word that addresses concrete situations and concerns, is addressed, first and foremost, to the community of believers, encouraging and empowering them to engage in history whether that means grieving that things are not right or trusting and participating in the promise of newness that is being effected by God. Thus, Brueggemann believes that it is the task of prophetic ministry “to bring the claims of the tradition and the situation of enculturation into an interface”¹⁹² in the hopes, first, of exposing and dismantling the false claims of the dominant consciousness (which he terms “royal” or “imperial”) by showing that it will indeed end and that it has no final claims upon us, and second, of offering a new vision of lived

¹⁹⁰Brueggemann, Prophetic Imagination, 9.

¹⁹¹Ibid., 11.

¹⁹²Ibid., 12.

reality.¹⁹³ He refers to these twin actions of the prophet that lead to a new vision and way of living as *criticizing* and *energizing* respectively. When engaging in history by criticizing the dominant culture, prophetic imagination appears as memory. When engaging in history as energizing persons and communities, prophetic imagination appears as hope.

Understanding prophecy as coming out of the covenantal tradition, Brueggemann begins with Moses whom he identifies as “the paradigmatic prophet who sought to evoke in Israel an alternative consciousness.”¹⁹⁴ The optimum word, he stresses, is *alternative*. The prophet offers a different vision, vocation, and way of engaging in reality. The royal consciousness is characterized by its commitment to an economics of affluence, a politics of oppression, and the establishment of a controlled static religion, what Brueggemann calls “the religion of the captive God.”¹⁹⁵ It nurtures a numbed consciousness and the denial of endings, change and death. Built on fear and pretense, the royal consciousness seeks, either by force or diversion, to squelch passion by replacing it with an achievable but false satiation, thus discouraging criticism and dissuading energy for anything new. Brueggemann states:

Imperial economics is designed to keep people satiated so that they do not notice. Its politics is intended to block out the cries of the denied ones. Its religion is to be an opiate so that no one discerns misery alive in the heart of God.¹⁹⁶

By providing both a model of criticizing and a model of energizing, Moses counters the

¹⁹³Ibid., 62.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 15.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 34.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 41.

static imperial religion of order and triumph with a religion of God's freedom. He confronts Pharaoh's politics of oppression and exploitation with a politics of justice and compassion.¹⁹⁷ He answers a royal consciousness committed to achievable satiation with the formation of a prophetic imagination, an alternative consciousness devoted to the pathos and passion of covenanting, whereby other persons are seen as brothers and sisters to care about and to suffer with and not merely as products to be used.¹⁹⁸

The Exodus event, Brueggemann proposes—decisive, unprecedented, and transformational—is the example par excellence of a radical criticism that dismantles the empire and evokes the experience of an alternative social reality. He writes:

Moses dismantles the religion of static imperialism by exposing the gods and showing that in fact they had no power and were not gods. Thus, the mythical legitimacy of Pharaoh's social world is destroyed . . . The mythic claims of the empire are ended by the disclosure of *the alternative religion of the freedom of God*.¹⁹⁹

Just as prophetic criticizing is not carping, prophetic energizing is more than shallow optimism. Brueggemann explains, "Energizing is closely linked to hope," and prophetic hope is not only familiar with anguish but also linked to the experience of a God who is not beholden to Pharaoh, who is alert to lived reality, who does take sides, and whose presence and will are discerned at the breaking points in human community.²⁰⁰

Like Heschel, Brueggemann insists that prophecy is necessarily and intimately connected to doxology. In fact, doxology is the ultimate challenge to the language of

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 36.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 42.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 16.

²⁰⁰Ibid., 23, 25.

managed reality utilized by the dominant culture. It is the supreme example of a new rhetoric, one that is so free and unco-opted that it cuts through ideology and transfigures fear into hopeful energy and replaces indifference with compassion and justice.²⁰¹

Brueggemann explains that over time the new consciousness and energy elicited by Moses is countered by the monarchy of Israel which proves “effective in silencing the criticism and denying the energizing.”²⁰² He notes, “Solomon was able to counter completely the counter-culture of Moses,” suggesting both the persistence of the royal consciousness and the perennial need for prophets.²⁰³ As the royal program carries on, new prophets do arise in every age in the spirit of Moses. Brueggemann focuses on two: Jeremiah and Second Isaiah, and through them awakens the reader to the tasks of prophetic ministry and to how prophetic imagination and action effect change.

Brueggemann offers one particular angle on understanding Jeremiah’s life and ministry: grief and lamentation.²⁰⁴ He shows how Jeremiah utilizes his prophetic imagination to struggle against the royal consciousness by “conjuring a funeral and bringing the grief of dying Israel to public expression.”²⁰⁵ He points out that the dominant culture is built on pretense, preserved by numbness, and committed to denial of limitations, failures, and endings (“forever” is always the word of the Pharaoh).²⁰⁶ Since

²⁰¹Ibid., 25, 26.

²⁰²Ibid., 109.

²⁰³Ibid., 36.

²⁰⁴Ibid., 9. Brueggemann notes that his treatment here of Jeremiah’s ministry is not meant to be comprehensive.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 109.

²⁰⁶Ibid., 47.

the royal consciousness leads to apathy, to numbness, especially to numbness about death, Brueggemann maintains:

The proper idiom for the prophet in cutting through the numbness and denial is the *language of grief*, the rhetoric that engages the community in mourning for a funeral they do not want to admit. It is indeed their own funeral.²⁰⁷

Brueggemann believes that real criticism of the dominant consciousness begins with the capacity to grieve because it is the most visceral announcement that things are not as they should be.²⁰⁸ The expression of grief and mourning, the crying in pathos, is the ultimate form of criticism, because it announces the sure end of fallacious arrangements that it is too costly for the royal community to face and embrace.²⁰⁹

As the model of radical criticism in the form of grief and grieving, Jeremiah exhibits its three essential tasks: first, to reactivate and offer symbols out of a particular historical past that are adequate to combat the horror and massiveness of the experience which evokes numbness and requires denial while being vehicles for redemptive honesty; second, to use metaphorical language to bring out into the light of recognition the very fears and terrors that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we do not know they are there; and three, to speak metaphorically but concretely, not out of rage or cheap grace but with candor born from anguish and pathos, about the deathliness that hovers above us and gnaws within us.²¹⁰

Although prophetic criticism sometimes manifests itself as rage and anger,

²⁰⁷Ibid., 46, 51.

²⁰⁸Ibid., 20.

²⁰⁹Ibid., 51.

²¹⁰Ibid., 49, 50.

Brueggemann argues that the characteristic idiom of prophetic criticism is anguish not anger.²¹¹ The intent of expressing grief is to invite and encourage people to engage in their own anguish and their own fear of death and dying, physical or otherwise. Thus prophecy involves discernment as well as mourning. By expressing the pain and ache of God, the prophetic minister encourages the alternative community to notice the presence of pain, to compassionately care for the grieving, to weep with the suffering, to accompany others as they embrace the endings that alone can lead to authentic hope and new beginnings. Weeping that functions as radical criticism permits newness and allows the kingdom to come.²¹²

Whereas Jeremiah utilizes the articulation of grief to counter the numbness and the pretense that things are all right, Second Isaiah utilizes the language of amazement to articulate a newness of life that seems unthinkable. According to Brueggemann, Second Isaiah is the model of prophetic energizing. In the preexilic times, Jeremiah seeks to penetrate numbness by expressing grief. In the exilic community, Second Isaiah attempts to penetrate despair by expressing hope. Brueggemann shows how Second Isaiah uses his prophetic imagination and creative symbolization to struggle against the royal consciousness by conjuring an enthronement festival to energize Israel to fresh faith.

This is a particularly difficult task, Brueggemann admits, since the royal consciousness snatches from the common person any sense of futurity, thrusting them into the tyranny of the present. How different this sense of the closed present is from the now (*nunc*) that Panikkar says is at the heart of contemplative consciousness and life. The

²¹¹Ibid., 80.

²¹²Ibid., 60-61.

royal consciousness that breeds numbness militates against hope and leads to despair. He explains:

For those who are denied entry into prosperity there is a kind of hopelessness because there is little or no prospect for change. . . And so in that time as in our own, the royal arrangement surely and properly evokes despair among those who are shut out.²¹³

In the face of the royal consciousness' persistence to remain intact, Brueggemann offers three modest tasks that serve as complementary actions to those used by Jeremiah in radical criticism: first, to reactivate and offer symbols from the community's shared memory that are evocative and potent enough to contradict the situation of hopelessness that is imbedded in and necessary to the imperial culture; second, to bring to public expression, through a lyrical and theological language of covenant that puts the community in touch with a personal God, the yearning for hopefulness and newness that has been so long denied and disallowed by the dominant culture that it has been forgotten; and three, to speak metaphorically but concretely about the real newness that comes to us and changes our situation.²¹⁴

Brueggemann believes that real energizing of the alternative consciousness is embodied in the language of amazement, in doxology, because it is the most subversive and powerful idiom by which the alternative community can be engaged in new discernments and celebrations of God's presence "right at the center of a scene from which we presumed [God] had fled."²¹⁵

Just as the purpose of lament is to help people face their own anguish, the purpose

²¹³Ibid., 63.

²¹⁴Ibid., 66-69.

²¹⁵Ibid., 69-70.

of amazement is to invite and encourage people to dare to engage in activating “those very symbols and stories that have always been the basis for contradicting the regnant consciousness” and thereby to embrace the absurd practice and subversive activity of speaking about God’s faithfulness that vetoes our faithlessness.²¹⁶ To practice doxology is to make an intentional and decisive act of hope which itself is the certain sign that we have not accepted the royal definition of reality.²¹⁷ It is, finally, to announce God’s sovereign faithfulness as our single referent and to confess God’s real and radical freedom.

In his own way of supporting the relationship between the mystical and the prophetic, Brueggemann stresses that Jeremiah, the poet of pathos, and Second Isaiah, the poet of amazement, the former speaking laments and the latter speaking doxologies, the one criticizing, the other energizing, cannot be torn from each other. He states:

Jeremiah alone leaves faith in death where God finally will not stay. And Second Isaiah alone leads us to imagine that there is comfort without tears and tearing. Clearly, only those who anguish will sing new songs. Without anguish the new song is likely to be strident and just more royal fakery.²¹⁸

In two of the last three chapters, Brueggemann, a Christian by confession, presents the prophetic ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, arguing that Jesus “is the fulfillment and quintessence of the prophetic tradition.”²¹⁹ On the one hand, he “presented the ultimate criticism of the royal consciousness. He has, in fact, dismantled the dominant

²¹⁶Ibid., 66, 68.

²¹⁷Ibid., 68, 72.

²¹⁸Ibid., 78.

²¹⁹Ibid., 97.

culture and nullified its claims.”²²⁰ On the other hand, he also “brought to public expression the newness given by God. The response to his work and person is amazement.”²²¹

Jesus’ life is characterized by opposition to the economics of affluence, the politics of oppression, and the religion of God’s captivity. Like the prophets before him, his life is oriented toward justice and compassion, shared humanity, and the freedom of God. The way of his prophetic criticism is seen most tangibly in his “decisive solidarity with marginal people and the accompanying vulnerability required by that solidarity.”²²² Like the prophets before him, Jesus brings “to expression and embodiment all the hurt, human pain, and grief that the dominant royal culture has tried so hard to repress, deny, and cover over.”²²³ Brueggemann writes:

Compassion forms a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as normal and natural but is an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness.²²⁴

Whether in the past or in the present, Brueggemann emphasizes that compassion poses a threat to the good order of Empires. Since Empires are not built on nor sustained by compassion, Jesus’ compassionate actions are not merely personal emotional reactions but rather “a public criticism in which he dares to act upon his concern against the entire

²²⁰Ibid., 81.

²²¹Ibid., 97.

²²²Ibid., 81.

²²³Ibid., 87.

²²⁴Ibid., 85.

numbness of his social context."²²⁵ According to Brueggemann, the culmination and fullest expression of Jesus' public and critical actions of standing with the marginalized, anguished, and exploited, is the crucifixion. He states:

The crucifixion is not to be understood simply in good liberal fashion as the sacrifice of a noble man, nor should we too quickly assign a cultic, priestly theory of atonement to the event. Rather, we might see in the crucifixion of Jesus the ultimate act of prophetic criticism in which Jesus announces the end of a world of death (the same announcement as that of Jeremiah) and takes that death into his own person. Therefore we say that the ultimate criticism is that God himself embraces the death that his people must die.²²⁶

The ultimate criticism of the cross is an act of self-emptying but not merely a meditative self-negation but rather "a thoroughly political image concerned with the willing surrender of power."²²⁷

More than the dismantling of the dominant culture, Jesus' ministry was concerned with announcing and creating the possibility for a new human beginning. The way of Jesus' prophetic energizing is seen most tangibly in his inauguration and embodiment of a new thing. Brueggemann emphasizes that the characteristic idiom of prophetic energizing is hope not optimism. "The point of this idiom is to permit the community to engage in amazement that will not be prevented by the despair of the community for whom everything has collapsed."²²⁸ The prophetic energizing of Jesus "gave people a future when they believed that the grim present was the end and the only possible state of

²²⁵Ibid.

²²⁶Ibid., 91.

²²⁷Ibid., 94.

²²⁸Ibid., 96.

existence.”²²⁹ The strangeness of his prophetic energizing lies in the fact that it is especially addressed to those deemed nonpersons and consigned to nonhistory by the dominant culture.²³⁰ Finally, Brueggemann holds up the resurrection of Jesus as the ultimate energizing and new futuring of God. Acknowledging that there is no empirical way to explain it out of any previously existing reality, Brueggemann chooses to understand the resurrection as an historical, political, and religious reality that is “of a piece with the earlier appearances of an alternative future by the prophetic word.”²³¹ He states:

The resurrection of Jesus is not to be understood in good liberal fashion as a spiritual development in the church. Nor should it be too quickly handled as an oddity in the history of God or as an isolated act of God’s power. Rather, it is the ultimate act of prophetic energizing in which a new history is initiated. It is a new history open to all but peculiarly received by the marginal victims of the old order.²³²

In the concluding chapter of his book, Brueggemann makes several comments on how his study relates to the actual practice of ministry. First, he emphasizes that the initial task of prophetic ministry is to form an alternative community that “knows it is about different things in different ways” than those peddled and promoted by the dominant culture. It instead involves the daily decision to address the crisis of having our alternative consciousness, and more importantly, our alternative vocation, co-opted and domesticated by the agenda of the dominant culture.²³³

²²⁹Ibid., 97.

²³⁰Ibid., 104.

²³¹Ibid., 107.

²³²Ibid.

²³³Ibid., 110.

Second, he makes it clear that “the practice of prophetic ministry is not some special thing done two days a week.”²³⁴ In other words, it is not something confined to one identifiable ecclesial ministry (e.g. the parish social action group). Rather, it refers to a particular hermeneutic and way of being that informs and affects all acts of ministry. It is requisite that the prophetic consciousness and action be understood as the responsibility of all the people and not the obligation, charitable choice, or unique charism of the few. Brueggemann makes his argument fully aware of the bourgeois nature and sometimes the outright obduracy of many congregations and congregants for whom the prophetic perspective is a threat.

Third, Brueggemann emphasizes that in the face of the numbness and the death denying inclination inherent in the dominant culture, prophetic ministry does not so much require anger and indignation as “it requires anguish and the sharing of pain.”²³⁵ Compassion makes suffering audible and visible allowing newness to come in through expressed pain where hope is born in shared pain.

Fourth, prophetic ministry must help people practice the kind of genuine yearning that penetrates despair and gives way to new possibilities and new futures. In a church that risks becoming illiterate in the language of hope, prophetic ministry must mine the memory of the community for its primal stories of rebirth, transformation, deliverance, and hopefulness. It must educate and support people in the subversive practice of hope.

²³⁴Ibid., 111.

²³⁵Ibid. The contrast between the slow response of the federal government to the victims of Hurricane Katrina and the almost immediate mobilization of compassionate action by private citizens on behalf of those suffering along the gulf coast seems to support Brueggemann’s argument that the royal consciousness leads to and is characterized by numbness, especially numbness about death, and is not philosophically, politically, or strategically arranged around compassion.

Finally, in a society that markets self-actualization and cavorts in self-congratulation, Brueggemann is convinced that we have lost in equal measure our capacity to lament the death of the old world and to receive in doxology the new world being given. The task of prophetic ministry is to help people learn to practice both lament and praise. While focusing on the prophetic dimension of faith, Brueggemann's emphasis on the twin tasks of criticizing and energizing, of grief and praise, specifically of holding them together as necessary and integral parts of one alternative consciousness is certainly similar to and kindred spirits of the argument that mysticism and prophecy must be held in graceful tension.

Another voice for the centrality of prophecy in the practice of pastoral ministry is that of Kenneth Leech. In many of his works, Leech stresses the importance of a spirituality that is both contemplative and active. I will focus here on his attention to the place of prophecy in pastoral ministry as argued in his book, Spirituality and Pastoral Care.

In order to fully understand Leech's view of the role of and need for the prophetic dimension of faith in pastoral care, we must briefly outline his understanding of Christian spirituality. He writes:

Christian spirituality is about a process of formation, a process in which we are formed by, and in, Christ: Christ who, sharing the form of God, assumed the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6). In this process we are *transformed* so that we come more and more to share the Christ nature."²³⁶

This "Christ-ening" process is a work of grace initiated by Christ. For our part, it involves confrontation, exploration, and struggle. According to Leech, an Anglican, the

²³⁶ Leech, Spirituality and Pastoral Care, 5.

goal of spiritual formation is Christian maturity. He clarifies:

This is not the same as psychological maturity, adjustment, the attainment of a balanced personality. It is a theological goal which will bring us into collision with prevailing values, and will therefore bring threats to our adjustment and our peace of mind. It will also bring us into collision with much that passes for Christianity and for spirituality in our society.²³⁷

Leech maintains that in this process the Bible has a central place. However, he believes that much of Christian spirituality has lost its biblical roots or suffers from a gross misuse of scripture. A case in point is a narrow, meticulous study of scripture that focuses on minutiae while remaining utterly untouched by the challenge of the Word. Another contemporary nemesis to a biblical spirituality is fundamentalism whose approach to scripture, Leech holds, is unintelligent, crusading, and selective. Leech writes:

If we are to be formed by the Word, we need to cultivate the opposite qualities: insight, contemplative listening, and the willingness to allow our culture not to distort the Word but to be confronted and challenged by it.²³⁸

For Leech, the prophetic dimension of pastoral care in light of an authentic spirituality manifest itself most clearly over against three dangerous misconceptions: first, that spirituality is primarily about self-cultivation implying that it can be divorced from the public arena and social concerns; second, that the goal of spirituality and prayer is inner peace and the cessation of conflict; and three, in light of these two points, that pastoral care and spiritual direction are concerned with "the reduction of conflict and disease or maladjustment."²³⁹

Leech insists biblical spirituality is a social spirituality. He contends that much

²³⁷Ibid., 6.

²³⁸Ibid., 8.

²³⁹Ibid., 32.

spirituality today has taken on undesirable qualities of contemporary culture, for example, its inclination toward narcissism and exorbitant attention toward self-cultivation and personal enlightenment. For Leech, Christian spirituality is not oriented toward a gnostic self-knowledge but rather concerned with the salvation and sanctification of a people. To be a Christian is to be part of an organism, a new community that is an extension of the Incarnation and committed to the realization of the Kingdom of God. He writes:

The Kingdom of God is the key to the necessary new reformation in which prayer and politics, spirituality and social justice, mysticism and prophecy, will find their true harmony and interdependence.²⁴⁰

Leech insists that there is no such thing as a private spirituality. He maintains, “The word ‘private’ is not a Christian word at all”²⁴¹ and asserts, “a test of our spirituality must be whether it makes us more aware of realities of the world, and therefore more ready to respond to them, or not.”²⁴² Echoing famous lines of Nikolai Berdyaev and Dag Hammarskjöld he states:

It is neither possible nor desirable in our time that the way of sanctification should not pass through the way of politics. It is inevitable that it should, for pure ethereal spirituality is neither conceivable nor Christian.²⁴³

Leech also emphasizes that Christian spirituality involves progress toward maturity. It is comprised of the ongoing formation of mutually encouraging persons into the likeness of Christ. In authentic spirituality, maturity means growth in love not the

²⁴⁰Ibid., 36.

²⁴¹Ibid., 31.

²⁴²Ibid., 35.

²⁴³Ibid., 40.

acquisition of knowledge or mental enlightenment. Besides, the knowledge *of God* “comes through love not through thought.”²⁴⁴ True spirituality is understood not as the experience of inner tranquility and personal adjustment but as movement together toward sharing the mind and mission of Christ. This movement or process of Christ-ening is “not the quest for inner peace of heart, but the stretching out of heart and mind towards the *shalom* which is inseparable from the justice and salvation of God.”²⁴⁵ Leech asserts, “Nowhere in Scripture is harmony preferred to truth or to justice.”²⁴⁶ Christian spirituality is fundamentally incarnational and therefore includes a spiritually-based commitment to action in the world that is opposed to any gnostic tendencies toward the dualism of spirit and matter.

According to Leech, the danger arises when those involved in pastoral ministry, knowingly or unknowingly, adopt and adapt the anemic and incomplete understanding of spirituality outlined above. Too often, the result is that pastoral care and spiritual direction deteriorate into ambulance work and become primarily concerned with the reduction of conflict and tension and the dissemination of peace and inner satisfaction. This orientation, he argues, is grounded in two false assumptions: “that it is possible, and that it is desirable.” He continues:

In fact, the nature of the pastoral relationship is one which does not allow us to escape from inner struggle, but rather idensifies it. The pastor or spiritual guide will experience and absorb the conflicts in others; indeed, it is probably the fear of this experience which scares so many pastors away from too intimate relationships in caring.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴Ibid., 33.

²⁴⁵Ibid., 36.

²⁴⁶Ibid., 40.

²⁴⁷Ibid., 35.

Leech claims that spirituality is not the result of acquiring a special set of skills and techniques. It comes as a result of engaging in, not avoiding, conflict and by confronting courageously and contemplatively realities that disturb us while having the potential to transform us. He contends, “We are formed through struggle.”²⁴⁸ Too often formation and care are oriented toward “a kind of analgesic spirituality” instead of a rootedness in God.²⁴⁹ Given that Christian spirituality involves incorporation *en Christo*, spiritual formation will necessarily include confronting demons in the desert and surviving the terror of the dark night. In the midst of such struggles, Leech maintains, what is needed most from the caregiver or spiritual director is solidarity and companionship not comfort (“except in the literal . . . sense of the word as strengthening: strengthening for combat, strengthening for the movement of the Kingdom).”²⁵⁰ What is needed is support in being aware and awake when the temptation is to dull both consciousness and feelings. What is needed is help in distinguishing the voice of God from other competing voices within them.

It is because of the contemporary inclination to reduce faith to the personal quest for inner peace and comfort, to avoid any kind of conflict, and to fail to see the struggle for justice as constitutive to Christian spirituality that Leech advises, “Today our urgent need is to recover the centrality of the prophetic church.”²⁵¹ It is especially in light of four trends in contemporary spirituality—a resurgence of cults, a revival of Christian

²⁴⁸Ibid., 31.

²⁴⁹Ibid., 33.

²⁵⁰Ibid., 36.

²⁵¹Ibid., 45.

fundamentalism, a revival of Christian anti-materialism, and a revival of self-cultivation—that Leech calls for the prophetic dimension of faith to insure an authentic biblical spirituality. For a spirituality to be authentic, biblical, and Christian, he believes it must resist the contemporary tendency to separate the prophetic and the pastoral. He writes:

[T]here is no support in the Old Testament prophetic tradition for the separation between a religion of justice and a religion of holiness. The intimate connection between them is basic to the Mosaic Law and is reinforced in the prophetic writings. . . .

The popular division between prophetic and pastoral ministry does not seem then to be biblically based, nor to have good historical support.²⁵²

Leech identifies six elements of prophecy that are relevant to present concerns and that he believes relate and are central to the ministry of pastoral care, especially as exercised in the ministry of spiritual direction. They are: discernment, prayer, right perception, interpretation, eccentricity, and humanity.

First, the prophets of Israel are people of vision. Leech explains:

The prophets are people of intense vision, clear perception and insight, and this vision is directly related to their proclamation. Clarity of perception precedes and shapes the prophetic utterance.²⁵³

Leech suggests that the attainment of spiritual discernment (*diakrisis*) is at the heart of spiritual direction and that this task is similar to that of the prophet who seeks to attain clear vision and insight

which can discern between true spirituality and false, between reality and illusion, between paths which lead to maturity and wholeness, and those which lead only to destruction and death. . . . The enriching of consciousness, the enhancement of vision, the sharpening of awareness:

²⁵²Ibid., 67.

²⁵³Ibid., 68.

these are of the essence of spirituality.²⁵⁴

Second, and closely linked with vision, the prophets were people of profound prayer and spiritual direction is inseparable from contemplative prayer. Leech states:

Contemplation involves moving away from dependence on props and structures, being set free from idols and false images of God. And here too the work of spiritual direction is akin to that of the prophet, for the prophet sees idolatry as more threatening to true religion than atheism.²⁵⁵

Third, just as the prophet seeks to perceive reality correctly and clearly, so too the spiritual director. Borrowing from Thomas Merton, Leech draws the parallel between the prophetic practice and spiritual direction by maintaining that both involve the “unmasking of illusion,” an aspect of spirituality that is never popular with individuals or with the dominant power who are committed to the shadow and the disguise.²⁵⁶

Fourth, “prophetic ministry is a ministry of interpretation, involving discernment and discrimination.”²⁵⁷ Similarly spiritual direction involves helping others to interpret the significance of events going on within them and without.

Fifth, a mark of the prophet that Leech points out may seem incidental or even antithetical to pastoral care is that of eccentricity. The prophets were disturbing characters committed to disturbing others. They were often dismissed as bizarre or written off completely as crazy. In reality, the prophet stood as “a sign of contradiction,” holy fools who refused “to conform to the dubious sanity of conventional society and its

²⁵⁴Ibid., 70.

²⁵⁵Ibid., 71.

²⁵⁶Ibid., 72.

²⁵⁷Ibid., 69.

accompanying conventional religion.”²⁵⁸ There are times when the spiritual director is the progeny and practitioner of this ministry of contradiction. Leech writes:

[I]n the work of spiritual direction there is an inescapable element of conflict, of spiritual warfare, of resistance. The director seeks to help nourish the inner resources needed in the struggle with principalities and powers, a struggle where often only the fool will enter the battleground.²⁵⁹

Finally, Leech points out that the prophets were extremely human and were concerned about and spoke to the humanness of others not simply to their religiousness. In fact, the prophets struggled against religion that was mere ‘religiosity’ and antithetical to humanity and human development. “Like the prophet,” Leech maintains, “the spiritual director must look beyond the ‘religious’ world towards the fulfillment and transfiguring of human personality and human society.”²⁶⁰ He insists that spirituality which portends to make persons more religious but in the meantime makes them less human is not Christian and is contrary to “the incarnational basis of spirituality theology.”²⁶¹

Leech argues for the importance of the prophetic perspective in ministry today, understanding pastoral care in terms of “a series of conflicts and responses to conflicts.”²⁶² However, he not only asserts that the prophetic dimension of faith is necessary for authentic spirituality and effective spiritual formation but also maintains that the prophets of Israel were not only confrontational individuals but guides, pastors, and spiritual directors in their own right as well.

²⁵⁸Ibid., 72.

²⁵⁹Ibid., 73.

²⁶⁰Ibid.

²⁶¹Ibid.

²⁶²Ibid., 66.

Keeping in mind the spiritual diagnoses and antidotes offered by these writers regarding the human predicament as manifested in the contemporary situation, we turn now to Abraham Heschel's theological vision beginning with his understanding of the human person.

CHAPTER 3

HUMAN BEING AND BEING HUMAN

To the end of formulating a pastoral care rooted in a religious interpretation of human existence and aimed at fostering authentic human living, the next four chapters will elucidate the theological vision of Abraham Heschel. In particular, I will focus on his understanding of the human person and on his interpretation of the meaning and reality of God. Since for Heschel theology and anthropology are intimately and necessarily intertwined, the method of our examination will be antiphonal in character, the explication of the one playing off and enhancing our understanding of the other and vice versa. The particular aim of this chapter is to offer an introduction to Heschel's understanding of the human person especially as presented in his book, Who Is Man?, which cogently expounds the difference between human being and being human. This eloquent and concise work articulates Heschel's conviction regarding the dignity, grandeur, predicament, and responsibility of the human person.

Before presenting his thought, it will be helpful to offer a sketch of Abraham Heschel's life, given that his theology is so inextricably connected to his religious upbringing and historical circumstances. Samuel H. Dresner, a former student and longtime friend of Rabbi Heschel, suggested, "One cannot properly understand Heschel the man without studying his thought." He added, "The obverse is also true: to properly understand Heschel's thought, one must examine his life."¹ We turn now to an

¹ Samuel H. Dresner, "Heschel the Man," in Abraham Joshua Heschel: Exploring His Life and

introduction to the life of Abraham Joshua Heschel.

The Itinerary of a Contemporary Zaddik

Abraham Joshua Heschel was born in 1907 in Warsaw, Poland. The youngest of six children of Moseh Mordecai and Reizel (Perlow) Heschel, he was the descendent of two lines of distinguished Hasidic rabbis. The offshoot of seven generations of Hasidic rebbes, he was related in one way or another to almost every great Hasidic leader of Eastern Europe. On his father's side, his ancestors include Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritz, known as the "Great Maggid," the foremost disciple and successor of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism; Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the "Apter Rav," for whom he was named, and Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn. On his mother's side, ancestors include Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz and Rabbi Levi Yitzhak.² In the Hasidic world of Eastern Europe, leadership was a matter of "dynastic" succession and Heschel was considered spiritual royalty. Great things were expected of him. His future seemed predestined.³

From his early childhood, Avrumele, ("little Abraham") as he was called, was considered special, an *illui*, a genius, both a religious and an intellectual prodigy. Heschel's Hasidic education followed the common pattern for males. Daily life revolved around rigorous study, reinforced by daily worship. Study focused on the memorization of the basic texts: the prayer book (*siddar*) and the Torah (the Five Books of Moses). This was followed by study of the Talmud, a collection of rabbinic writings consisting of

Thought, ed. John Merkle (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1985), 4.

²Dresner, "Heschel the Man," 4, 5, 13; and in "Susannah Heschel, "Introduction," in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, ix.

³Edward K. Kaplan and Samuel H. Dresner, Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 22.

Mishna and the Gamara, the former being a collection of Jewish law, and the latter being a commentary on the Mishna. Talmud was the foundation of Jewish life, personally, communally, and spiritually. Soon after, study included Midrash (rabbinic commentaries on the Hebrew scriptures) and Hasidic texts.⁴ In addition to these sources, by his early youth Heschel was intimately familiar with texts from Kabbalah.⁵

Even though it was common for religiously educated Jewish boys in this environment to have extraordinary memories and mental aptitudes fostered by repetitive Talmud study, developing the ability to scan an entire page and read quickly, Heschel's abilities were prodigious and legendary. Samuel Dresner recalls the excitement of once bringing Rabbi Heschel a rare Hasidic book that had been given to him. Heschel took the book, went into his study for twenty minutes, and came back having memorized the entire text.⁶

At the age of three or four Heschel began formal studies with a tutor and by age five scholars would lift him onto a table and amuse themselves by listening to his clever answers to questions regarding religious texts. Reared not only as a prodigy but as a "little rebbe," his daily life was one of intense piety and religious observance.⁷ His "character was cultivated so that his very presence announced his inner piety."⁸ From an early age, people treated him with deference. Adults stood when he entered a room.⁹

⁴Ibid., 22, 24.

⁵Rothschild, ed., in Introduction to Between God and Man, 7.

⁶Dresner, Heschel, Hasidism, and Halakha, 55.

⁷S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, ix.

⁸Kaplan and Dresner, Prophetic Witness, 22.

⁹S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, ix; Kaplan and Dresner, Prophetic Witness, 27.

Of the religious piety that was the milieu in which he was raised, Heschel says:

In my childhood and in my youth, I was the recipient of many blessings, I lived in the presence of quite a number of extraordinary persons I could revere. And just as I lived as a child in their presence, their presence continues to live in me as an adult.¹⁰

In his introduction to the first collection of Heschel's writings, Professor Fritz Rothschild comments on this pious upbringing and some of the spiritual riches Hasidism spawned in Heschel:

Growing up in the closed theonomous world of Jewish piety, Heschel gained in the formative years of childhood and youth two things that are manifest on every page of his published work: a knowledge and an understanding. The *knowledge* of the Jewish religious heritage was acquired through an undeviating attention during most of his waking hours to study rabbinical literature. . . . The *understanding* for the realness of the spirit and for the holy dimension of all existence was not primarily the result of book learning but the cumulative effect of life lived among people who "were sure that everything hinted at something transcendent"; that the presence of God was a daily experience and the sanctification of life a daily task.¹¹

Heschel's father was his earliest significant influence "for he actualized within himself the spirit of the prayer book."¹² As a result, the death of Heschel's father from typhus when Abraham was not yet ten was the most profound experience and loss of his youth. Already held in high esteem and considered, in Hasidic terms, a *baal nefesh* (master of rare spiritual power), many people wanted the young Heschel immediately to assume the leadership of his father's flock, although, largely due to his mother's wisdom and influence, he did not.

After his father's death, Heschel's maternal uncle, Alter Israel Shimon Perlow, the Novominsker rebbe, "whose entire life conveyed holiness," became the central

¹⁰Abraham Joshua Heschel, "In Search of Exaltation," in S. Heschel, ed., *Moral Grandeur*, 227.

¹¹Rothschild, *Between God and Man*, 7-8.

¹²Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, 18.

influence in Heschel's life.¹³ He assumed charge of Heschel's education, making the death of Abraham's father the marker for a powerful struggle that would forever impact and characterize Heschel's life and work. Up to this time, Abraham had been influenced by the spirituality of his father, which was kin to that of the great rebbes on his paternal side, whose spirituality was aligned with that of the Baal Shem Tov.

In his posthumously published book, A Passion for Truth, Heschel describes the way of Reb Israel Baal Shem Tov whose vision of the world and way in it had been "richly nourished by the doctrine of Jewish mysticism."¹⁴

He revealed the Divine as present even in our shabby world, in every little thing, and especially in man. He made us realize that there was nothing in man--neither limb nor movement--that did not serve as vessel or vehicle for the Divine force. No place was devoid of the Divine. . . . Furthermore, every man in this world could work deeds that might affect the worlds above. Most important, attachment to God was possible, even while carrying out mundane tasks or making small talk¹⁵

When Reb Perlow supervised Heschel's education, he directed him toward the Hasidism of Ger who tended to follow the path of Rabbi Menahem Mendl Morgenstern of Kotzk.¹⁶ By doing so, Heschel's uncle,

indirectly but decisively, introduced him to the Hasidic manner of Kotzk, a radical perspective that clashed with the optimistic traditions that had shaped his identity until then. The result, as Heschel described it, sundered his personality between opposite poles, "the joy of Medzibozh [the home of the Baal Shem Tov] and the anxiety of Kotzk." Heschel's mature personality—and his modern temperament—emerged from that inner tension.¹⁷

¹³Ibid., 45.

¹⁴Heschel, Passion for Truth, 19.

¹⁵Ibid., 6.

¹⁶Kaplan and Dresner, Prophetic Witness, 38.

¹⁷Ibid., 36.

These two Hasidic masters represent opposite poles of Hasidism and the spiritual life, the Baal Shem's life and teaching characterized by light, mercy, love, presence, joy, compassion and oriented toward the many, the Kotzker's by darkness, harshness, judgement, absence, anxiety, severity, and meant for the select few. "The Baal Shem instilled the thought of the Shekhinah in men's hearts and souls," whereas "to the Kotzker this thought was irritating."¹⁸ "The Baal Shem saw the world filled with light, glory, divinity."¹⁹ The Kotzker "felt the crassness of the world, its falseness, its corruption."²⁰ The Baal Shem "inspired joy, the Kotzker contrition. The former began with grace, the latter with indignation. A light glowed in Mezbizh; a fire raged in Kotzk."²¹ "The Baal Shem Tov's intention was to prevent piety from hardening into mere routine," while "the Kotzker's presence recalls the nightmare of mendacity."²² Commenting on Heschel's struggle to negotiate these two forces in his life, Heschel scholar, John Merkle, states:

Perhaps this accounts for Heschel's uniqueness and wisdom: he combined within himself the spirit of two such divergent masters. Though single-minded, he was never one-sided. Throughout his life and works, Heschel kept alive the principle of polarity. Perhaps this is what accounts for the depth and breadth of insight found in his writings. It was precisely because Heschel allowed neither the Baal Shem nor the Kotzker to prevail one over the other as his guide that Heschel's depiction of human existence and of Jewish faith is so penetrating and complete.²³

¹⁸Heschel, Passion for Truth, 30.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 31.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 25.

²¹*Ibid.*, 15.

²²*Ibid.*, 9, xv.

²³Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 6.

By the time he was twelve, Heschel had read most of his father's library.²⁴ At age thirteen, as was the custom, Heschel became a *bar mitvah* (literally a son of the commandments). He was a qualified Talmud scholar by age fourteen, and published his first commentaries on Talmud and later rabbinic works starting at age fifteen. He was ordained at the age of sixteen.²⁵

Although Heschel was reared in the insular shtetl world of Eastern European Hasidism, the instability caused by World War I and the Bolshevik revolution thrust Europe into a crisis. Poland, Warsaw in particular, became flooded with new ideas, new organizations, new publications and gatherings due to the large number of refugees from Russia and Lithuania. Heschel's intellectual curiosity caused him to venture beyond his ancestral world, where he added "current periodicals, newspapers, and secular books to his voluminous religious inquiries."²⁶ Many devout Jewish youth abandoned the way of *halakhah*, the rules of religious behavior. Many others, including Heschel himself, remained faithful to rabbinic authority while becoming worldly in their outward appearance. "Photographs of Heschel and his brother, Jacob, around sixteen to eighteen years of age show them without beards and earlocks, and his unmarried sisters dressed stylishly."²⁷

Fischl Schneerson, a physician, psychiatrist, writer, acclaimed public speaker, and descendent of the founders of Lubavitch Hasidism, Hillel Zeitlin, a writer, philosopher, and mystic, and Mica Josef Berdyczewski, an author and descendent of Hasidic rabbis,

²⁴Kaplan and Dresner, *Prophetic Witness*, 28.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 46-47.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 57.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 58.

were early models and influences of Heschel's confrontation with modernity.²⁸ For the rest of his life, he would struggle to hold these two dimensions together: the treasures of tradition and the signs of the time. Rooted in the religious but awake to the secular, his writings and life are a bridge between the two. In his book, The Promise of Heschel, Franklin Sherman writes:

[W]hile appreciatively absorbing the riches of the modern intellectual tradition, he remembered with equal appreciation the world of fervent faith and piety from which he had come; and he resolved to try to hold the two works together. He would neither forsake his faith in order to adjust to the modern world, nor retreat from the world in order to preserve his faith. Rather he would allow each element to criticize as well as fructify the other.²⁹

Heschel's need for self-expression and his first real taste of life beyond the Jewish shtetl came in the form of the publication of his poetry in Yiddish periodicals and anthologies and his involvement in the Yiddish Writer's Association in Warsaw.³⁰ During this time, the young Heschel began to envision a university education, but candidates were required to receive a diploma from a government-certified gymnasium. Not wanting to bring embarrassment on his family, Heschel decided to move to Vilna, Lithuania to make the transition from his Hasidic community to a secular education. Heschel's family understood his craving for knowledge but worried about the forces of assimilation and disbelief.³¹ Attempts to persuade the Hasidic prince to stay and study in Warsaw failed. Thus began Heschel's farewell to his family's majestic expectations of him.³² From this

²⁸Ibid., 52-64.

²⁹Sherman, Promise of Heschel, 15.

³⁰This early work has recently been published in English. See Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Ineffable Name of God: Man (New York: Continuum, 2004).

³¹Kaplan and Dresner, Prophetic Witness, 69

³²Ibid., 66, 69.

point on, Heschel always lived as a deeply observant Jew, but one in conversation with and concerned about the “outside” world. Samuel Dresner points out the irony in the evolution of Heschel’s life given the direction he chose when he was an adolescent. Instead of being a *nasi*, a prince, and a *zaddik*, a Hasidic master or holy man, for his people alone, he became a nasi and “the zaddik of his generation” for a world-wide, interfaith community.³³ His reputation as royalty, spiritual leader and master has continued, if not increased, since his death.

While in Vilna he co-founded a writer’s group, developed his literary interests, and graduated from the Gymnasium in June 1927. From there Heschel went to Berlin, considered the great European center of intellectual and cultural life. He enrolled not only at the university but also at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums. By April 1929, Heschel passed exams in German language and literature, Latin, mathematics, German history, and geography. He focused his studies on philosophy, with secondary work in art history and philology. At the Hochschule, he trained in the modern scientific study of Jewish texts and history. In December 1929, he passed exams in Hebrew language, Bible and Talmud, *Midrash*, liturgy, philosophy of religion, and Jewish history and literature. In Berlin, Heschel secured his first teaching position (as an instructor on talmudic exegesis). Continuing his studies, his doctoral work involved study and testing on a broad range of topics. Three weeks after Hitler came to power, he completed his Ph.D. from the University of Berlin in 1933, writing his dissertation, *die Prophetie*, which he would later rework, expand, and publish in 1962 as the classic work in English,

³³Dresner, Heschel, Hasidism and Halakha, 25.

The Prophets.³⁴

For the next two years Heschel lived in Berlin, taught at the Hochschule as well as at the Judisches Lehrhaus in Berlin, served as a reader and editor for a series of books, all the while watching the spread and intensification of Hitler's evil power. In 1937, Martin Buber convinced Heschel to take over his position as the director of the Mittelstelle für Jüdische Erwachsenen Bildung in Frankfurt, the Central Organization for Jewish Adult Education. Through all this Heschel continued to nurture his religious life, lectured around Germany to Jewish groups, and spoke of the responsibility of religious leaders in Nazi Germany. With the exception of the Quakers and select others, he was appalled by the lack of action on the part of his Christian colleagues and Christian leaders on behalf of the Jews. In 1938, Heschel, along with other Polish Jews, was suddenly arrested and deported. He stood for the duration of a three-day journey by train to Poland.³⁵ Back in Warsaw, he taught for eight months at the Institute for Jewish Studies.³⁶

Like some of his family who had emigrated years earlier, Heschel sought to find a way out of Europe. Six weeks before the German invasion of Poland, he succeeded in leaving Warsaw for London. From London, he immigrated to the United States in March 1940 with the aid of Julian Morgenstern, the President of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati who for years had worked to secure visas in order to bring Jewish scholars out of Europe to safe haven.³⁷

Heschel's first years in America were painfully lonely. He knew almost no one in

³⁴S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, xi-xiii.

³⁵*Ibid.*, xii-xvii

³⁶Rothschild, Between God and Man, 8.

³⁷S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, xviii.

the United States and his English was poor. His isolation was made worse by the fact that Hebrew Union College was adamantly Reformed, serving non-kosher food in the cafeteria, leaving Heschel, one of the few who observed traditional Jewish mores, to eat alone in his room. Few students and faculty had any affection or appreciation for the Hasidic piety that was Heschel's background.³⁸ While in Cincinnati, he taught at the college, learned and refined his English, and worked tirelessly to bring his mother, sisters, friends, and colleagues to America. In private meetings and at Jewish conferences he struggled without success to alert and elicit the concern of the American Jewish community to the grave plight of the European Jews. His lack of status as a new immigrant coupled with the suspicion of his so-called mysticism, gave him little power to persuade. He resorted to writing. An article published in 1943 in the *Hebrew Union College Bulletin*, written when the death-camp fires and war were still raging, an English revision of a speech he gave in 1938 in Frankfurt, was a powerful wartime outcry and challenge. Today it stands as a testament to his prophetic indignation and grief. For years, Heschel had attempted to draw attention to the horror perpetuated by Hitler and others, a catastrophe whose brutal inception he had witnessed and experienced firsthand. Long before the trend of "Holocaust theology," he raised the questions, "Where was God?" and "Where was humanity?" as seen in his 1951 book, Man is Not Alone and in his Jewish theological summa, God in Search of Man published in 1955.³⁹

Although he never devoted himself to a specific work on the Holocaust, it is credible to maintain that everything he wrote from the 1940's onward was written with a

³⁸Susannah Heschel, "Heschel as Mensch: Testimony of His Daughter," in To Grow in Wisdom: An Anthology of Abraham Joshua Heschel, ed. Jacob Neusner (Lanham: MD, Madison Books, 1990), 199.

³⁹Kaplan and Dresner, Prophetic Witness, 115-20

pathos rooted specifically in the personal, communal, and human loss effected by that ignominious event. He dedicated his book, *The Prophets* (1962), written in English, "To the martyrs of 1940-1945." His 1962 study of Talmud, *Torah min ha-shamayim* (Torah from the Heavens), written in Hebrew, is dedicated to his martyred family.⁴⁰ The dedication in his final work, written in Yiddish and published after his death, *Kotzk: a gerangl far emesdikeyt* (Kotzk: The Struggle for Integrity), includes his colleague, Leo Hirsh, who died in a labor camp. In Heschel's immediate family, only those who fled before the war began survived. His brother Jacob and family went to London, and his sister Sarah and her husband and children immigrated to New York. His mother and three sisters, Esther Sima, Gittel, and Deborah Miriam, were murdered by the Nazis as were many of his close friends and colleagues. In an interview during the height of the Vietnam War, Heschel identifies himself in this way:

I am really a person who lives in anguish. I cannot forget what I have seen and have been through. Auschwitz and Hiroshima never leave my mind. Nothing can be the same after that.⁴¹

In a now famous address delivered in the 1960's, from which I will quote more extensively later, he describes himself thus:

I am a brand plucked from the fire, in which my people was burned to death. I am a brand plucked from the fire of an altar of Satan on which millions of human lives were exterminated to evil's greater glory.⁴²

Heschel scholar, Edward Kaplan, maintains that Heschel's self-identity was

⁴⁰This work has recently been translated into English and published under a new title. See Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations*, ed and trans. Gordon Tucker with Leonard Levin (New York: Continuum, 2005)

⁴¹As quoted in Edward K. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, 117.

⁴²Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion Is An Island," in *No Religion Is An Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Harold Kasimow and Byron L. Sherwin (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 3.

solidified when in 1938 in Germany, he “reaffirmed his loyalty to God.” He states:

History had forced Heschel to become a prophetic witness. He had decided that he would represent, for the post-Holocaust world, a model of observant East European Jewry and the continuing covenant. He defended authentic religion—which includes a real God Who demands everything—and its terrifying imperative: “The mountain of history.”⁴³

Unable to rescue the physical lives of his family and friends, he consecrated his life to *tikkun ha olam* and to *tikkun ha nephesh*. Sadly aware of what he called the “spiritual absenteeism” in American Jews, he “sought to retrieve the Jewish soul from oblivion.”⁴⁴

While in Cincinnati, Heschel met Sylvia Straus, a concert pianist. They were married in December 1946, after Heschel had moved to New York, accepting a position at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America where he taught for the next twenty-seven years until his death in December 1972. They had one child, daughter Susannah. In the 1930's and 1940's, Heschel's writing consisted mainly of biblical scholarship and scholarly studies on key figures in Jewish medieval philosophy: Solomon ibn Gabirol, Maimonides, Abravanel, and Saadia Gaon. Once he was married, as was the custom, he undertook and produced his major theological corpus. Masterful tour de forces of religious thought seemed to pour out of him in the 1950's. In 1950 he published his tribute to Eastern European Hasidism, The Earth Is the Lord's. In 1951 he published The Sabbath and Man Is Not Alone, a study of the philosophy of religion, followed by Man's Quest for God in 1954 and his philosophy of Judaism, God In Search of Man in 1955.

In the 1960's Heschel published The Prophets (1962), Who Is Man? (1965) and The Insecurity of Freedom (1966). The Prophets, a revised and passionate introduction to

⁴³Kaplan, Holiness in Words, 122.

⁴⁴Ibid., 11.

the Hebrew prophets, and The Insecurity of Freedom, a compilation of essays and talks, reveal the spiritual foundation, theological vision, and practical impetus for his increasingly public moral and political commitments. Heschel stated that encountering the prophets so intimately while reworking his doctoral dissertation as the social upheaval in the 1960's became more intense and real, led him to move out of his study and onto the streets.

Combining the rarest of gifts, Abraham Heschel is a mystic, poet, prince, scholar, social critic, activist, and holy man. Especially in the last decade of his life, we see the convergence of Heschel's passions and commitments. In Heschel, the synagogue, the study, and the streets converge. Before it was fashionable and when it was still costly, Heschel spoke out against the Vietnam War. He was one of the first American Jews to draw attention to the plight of Russian Jewry. A personal friend of President Zalman Shazar, he supported and celebrated the State of Israel, while maintaining that neither statehood nor cultural nationalism could substitute for Judaism's religious teachings.⁴⁵ He named the horror of racism and in Selma, Alabama marched arm-in-arm with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for civil rights. Heschel's commitment and most important accomplishment to Christian-Jewish relations is seen in his involvement in the Second Vatican Council. Heschel met several times with Pope Paul VI, who read and recommended his works to Catholics. Forming a friendship with Cardinal Bea, who directed the composition of *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican's pronouncement concerning relations with non-Catholic religions, Heschel became the most influential Jewish voice in the writing of that document. He challenged believers to participate in authentic

⁴⁵S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, xxv.

ecumenism insisting the choice was between interfaith or internihilism, and he advocated publicly for children, youth, the sick, the elderly, and the poor.⁴⁶ Rabbi Heschel died in his sleep on December 23, 1972, on a Sabbath, with “a kiss from God.”⁴⁷ In a fitting and enduring symbol, on the night stand next to his bed were two books he had been reading: one a Hasidic classic, the other a work on the war in Vietnam.

Jewish scholar and author, Jacob Neusner, expresses the view of many when he summarizes the great legacy of Heschel as religious thinker and prophetic witness. He writes:

Abraham Joshua Heschel, 1907-1972, was the greatest religious thinker in Judaism, east or west, in the twentieth century and certainly the most profound and weighty theologian of Judaism ever to work in North America. . . . There was none like him, none near him, none who approached his power to join together intellectual achievement in analysis and advocacy and public service. In his lifetime he gained the position of the single most influential Judaic thinker in public life and within the community of Judaism, and, after his death, he has found an enduring and engaged audience for his thought. And that is how it should be, for his was Torah and human greatness in a single person.⁴⁸

With Heschel’s background serving as a personal and poignant context, we turn now to his understanding of the nature and destiny of the human person.

A Sacred Humanism

Pastoral care is directed, first and foremost, toward human beings. Although not the exclusive focus of pastoral theology and care, the human person is the primary object of our attention. Even when offering guidance and care to families, institutions, societal

⁴⁶See essays based on talks Heschel delivered on these topics in Insecurity of Freedom.

⁴⁷S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, xxix; Samuel H. Dresner, ed., I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology (New York: Crossroad, 1983), ix.

⁴⁸Jacob Neusner, “Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Man,” in To Grow in Wisdom: An Anthology of Abraham Joshua Heschel, ed. Jacob Neusner (Lanham: Madison Books, 1990), 3.

systems, international organizations, and the planet, it necessarily involves dealing with and attending to persons. If we are going to care for humans, then it follows that we examine what it means to be human. As Heschel puts the question, “What is human about a human being?”⁴⁹ What do we make of the grandeur, dilemma, and destiny of the human person? “How can I relate my life to the source of ultimate meaning? Why am I here at all, and what is my purpose? . . . Is my life nothing but a statistical symbol? A scientific fact? Or is life a symbol for God? A dramatic opportunity?”⁵⁰

That we identify the type of care this dissertation addresses as *pastoral* insinuates that it is not merely concerned with certain aspects or areas of a person’s life, but rather with the totality of the human person, and with that reality which connects us to the divine, namely, the *soul*. Given that we are considering the human being as a whole, and because our understanding of what being human means necessarily shapes the motivation, task, method, and purpose of pastoral theology and care, it is essential that we reclaim a thoroughly religious understanding of the human person. Only an anthropology that is explicitly theological, that is clear about the nature, predicament, and ultimate task of the human being, is capable of giving birth to a compatible pastoral care. Thus the word *pastoral* is meant to suggest that this care is explicitly religious in nature and concerned with “what is decisive and central about” humans.⁵¹ Care of souls, *cura animarum*, is the graced practice of caring for the human person in a holistic way as the

⁴⁹Friedman, Abraham Joshua Heschel, 24.

⁵⁰Heschel, “Idols in the Temples,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 59.

⁵¹Heschel, Who Is Man?, 20. It is my conviction and conception that the modifier *pastoral* in the term pastoral care signals not a separate section of a person or community’s life, namely, the religious, but rather refers to the totality of the human experience which is fundamentally religious or soulful and intentionally cultivated, nurtured, and sustained as a ministry of the ecclesial community. Admittedly, this is not the first thing that comes to mind when this term is tossed around in church circles.

meaning and manner of living is informed by and interpreted from the perspective of faith.

One of Heschel's most important contributions for pastoral ministers is his comprehensive view of the human person, a creative construct rooted in the Hebrew Bible, especially as extracted from the prophets, and in the mystical traditions of Judaism. One major interpreter of Rabbi Heschel's work, Edward Kaplan, refers to this anthropology as Heschel's "sacred humanism," a prophetic activism grounded in a mystical piety.⁵² In the aftermath of two generations of pastoral workers who have looked to behavioral and social scientists for theories, inspiration, and guidance, Heschel offers a vision for soul care that is fundamentally religious in nature, unapologetic in tone, and substantial in its implications. In a prelude to his systematic presentation of the significance of "the totality of man's existence," Heschel contends "any specialized study of man treating each function and drive in isolation tends to look upon the totality of the person from the point of view of a particular function or drive." This, he claims, causes "an increasing atomization of our knowledge of man, [and] . . . the fragmentation of personality," resulting in what he refers to as a "metonymical" view of the person, "mistaking the part for the whole."⁵³ Whereas he acknowledges that the "behavioral sciences have enriched our knowledge of psychological, biological, and sociological facts and patterns of behavior by observation and description," he cautions that they should not overreach their bounds.⁵⁴ Left to themselves they are insufficient for addressing or explaining the depth of human existence. "Our understanding of man is dangerously

⁵²Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, 99-112.

⁵³Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 4.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 9.

incomplete,” warns Heschel, “if we dwell exclusively on the facts of human being and disregard what is at stake in human being.”⁵⁵ “Without a sense of significant being,” he insists, “a sense of wonder and mystery, a sense of reverence for the sanctity of being alive, the doctor’s efforts and prescriptions may prove futile.”⁵⁶

Heschel maintains that we cannot understand the meaning, depth, and destiny of human being unless fundamentally understood as a being in relationship to God. He challenges pastoral theologians and caregivers to assume their rightful role of offering the spiritual vision, guidance, and care that are commensurate with the mystery of the human person. He claims:

The first task of religion is to serve as a reminder that man has a soul, that the community has a soul. Did we not witness how entire nations lost their souls? The surest way to forfeit the soul is to ignore the spirit.⁵⁷

For Heschel, a religious vision of human existence begins with the conviction that humans are fundamentally *soulful* beings, intrinsically spiritual. The term *spiritual* for Heschel means “the reference to the transcendent in our own existence, the direction of the Here toward the Beyond.”⁵⁸ The human is inextricably connected to the divine. Therefore, we cannot reduce human persons to their mere physicality, to the observable facts of their behavior, nor define them “in terms of objective qualities.”⁵⁹ Humans are much more than their human nature and “can be understood only in terms of [their] total

⁵⁵Ibid., 10.

⁵⁶Friedman, Abraham Joshua Heschel, 26.

⁵⁷Heschel, “Idols in the Temples,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 61.

⁵⁸Heschel, God In Search of Man, 41.

⁵⁹Heschel, Who is Man?, 10.

situation, in terms of the demands [they are] called upon to answer.”⁶⁰ As mentioned in Chapter One, the “chief problem” for humanity, Heschel asserts, is not human nature but human living. The paramount question is: what will they do with their nature.⁶¹

The Person as Polarity

In the fall of 1965, Abraham Heschel gave his memorable inaugural lecture as the Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He began the address with these words:

I speak as a member of a congregation whose founder was Abraham, and the name of my rabbi is Moses. I speak as a person who was able to leave Warsaw, the city in which I was born, just six weeks before the disaster began. My destination was New York, it would have been Auschwitz or Treblinka. I am a brand plucked from the fire, in which my people was burned to death. I am a brand plucked from the fire of an altar of Satan on which millions of human lives were exterminated to evil’s glory, and on which so much else was consumed: the divine image of so many human beings, many people’s faith in the God of justice and compassion, and much of the secret and power of attachment to the Bible bred and cherished in the hearts of men nearly two thousand years.⁶²

This passage vividly accentuates the very real backdrop for Heschel’s view of the human person. Though originally a rather bookish, somewhat secluded scholar, it is Heschel’s studied awareness and experience of this particular *Sitz im Leben* seen through the eyes of the Jewish prophets that most influences his anthropology and instigates the increasingly prophetic and public nature of his own faith. On the one hand, the passage explains his sober and penetrating awareness of the human gravitation toward malice and evil. On the other hand, it serves to highlight the depth of his faith: faith in a God whose *modus*

⁶⁰Ibid

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Heschel, “No Religion is an Island,” 3.

operandi he describes as passionate, personal concern for humanity, and faith in humanity who he believes bears a resemblance to God and possesses the capacity for holiness.

The fire that Rabbi Heschel escaped, and that his family and friends did not, seared into him forever what he knew too well from the brutality of human history and the wisdom gleaned from his Jewish heritage: that to adhere to a roseate anthropology is to perpetuate an illusion and to live a Pollyannaish lie. He mourns:

Because of his immense power, man is potentially the most wicked of beings. He often has a passion for cruel deeds that only fear of God can soothe, suffocating flushes of envy that only holiness can ventilate.⁶³

Yet, when the fire he escaped could have indelibly burned into him a bitter spirit and a loathing for humanity, condemning humans as fundamentally depraved, he instead chooses to live with the conviction that the human person is a surprise, a complex of opportunities, a partner of God, a precious jewel unique and unrepeatable, a divine need. Of the human person he sings, "There is more potentiality in his soul than in any other being known to us."⁶⁴ Thus, Heschel's theological anthropology is both tempered by realism and fired by hope, aware of the mark of Cain and convinced of the image of God, conscious of the pull of ignominy and awake to the capacity for nobility.

For Heschel, polarity (what he sometimes calls paradox) not only is a characteristic of the dialectical nature of religious existence but also a vehicle for structuring our perception of reality.⁶⁵ It is fitting, in light of this principle that is so central to his life and works, that Rabbi Heschel's formal title at Jewish Theological

⁶³Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 211

⁶⁴Heschel, Who Is Man?, 39; Man Is Not Alone, 209.

⁶⁵Sherwin, Abraham Joshua Heschel, 22.

Seminary in New York encapsulates this tension-within-opposites. He was professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism. His books themselves embody the very commitment to polarity that he maintains is necessarily present in human life. One Heschel interpreter, Byron Sherwin, points out, for example, that Heschel's Man's Quest for God, his treatment of prayer and religious symbolism, is the polar opposite and the response to God in Search of Man, his philosophical exposition of Judaism that emanates from the central thesis that God is the benevolent initiator in pursuit of humanity.⁶⁶ These books are not only complements to one another but each develops the theme of polarity within its own pages and context. Man's Quest for God includes a section called, "The Polarity of Prayer" which introduces and develops the two opposite principles that guide Jewish prayer. The three major sections in God in Search of Man: God, Revelation, and Response, suggest the polarity of faith inherent in the dynamic relationship between the people and God. This polarity is best summed up as divine initiative and human response.

Another example is his last book in English, A Passion for Truth, published posthumously. In the beginning of this book about Reb Menahem Mendl of Kotzk, known as the Kotzker, and the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, he contrasts two influential Jewish figures with opposite visions, personalities, and ways of being in the world: the Baal Shem Tov, from Mezbizh, the founder of the Hasidic movement, and as mentioned earlier, favored by his father, and the Kotzker, preferred by his maternal uncle.⁶⁷ Heschel's own struggle to live in the tension between these two formative figures is illuminative of his commitment to and conviction about polarity.

⁶⁶Ibid., 23.

⁶⁷Ibid.

In a very strange way I found my soul at home with the Baal Shem but driven by the Kotzker. Was it good to live with one's heart torn between the joy of Mezbizh and the anxiety of Kotzk? To live both in awe and consternation, in fervor and horror, with my conscience on mercy and my eyes on Auschwitz, wavering between exaltation and dismay? Was this a life a man would choose to live? I had no choice: my heart was in Mezbizh, my mind was in Kotzk.⁶⁸

For Heschel, the notion of polarity is at the heart of the Jewish faith and experience. To illuminate this point, I quote at length the following passage of Rabbi Heschel:

Jewish thinking and living can only be adequately understood in terms of a dialectic pattern, containing opposite or contrasted properties. As in a magnet, the ends of which have opposite magnetic qualities, these terms are opposite to one another and exemplify a *polarity* which lies at the very heart of Judaism, the polarity of ideas and events, of mitzvah and sin, of kavanah and deed, of regularity and spontaneity, of uniformity and individuality, of halacha and agada, of law and inwardness, of love and fear, of understanding and obedience, of joy and discipline, of the good and the evil drive, of time and eternity, of this world and the world to come, of revelation and response, of insight and information, of empathy and self-expression, of creed and faith, of the word and that which is beyond words, of man's quest for God and God in search of man. Even God's relation to the world is characterized by the polarity of justice and mercy, providence and concealment, the promise of reward and the demand to serve Him for His sake. Taken abstractedly, all these terms seem to be mutually exclusive, yet in actual living they involve each other; the separation of the two is fatal to both.⁶⁹

According to Heschel, polarity is not just a characteristic of Judaism. "Polarity is an essential trait of all things," he states, reflecting an essential kabbalistic idea.⁷⁰ Therefore, human nature itself, the very make-up of the human person, is defined by inner polarity as well.

Man is "a little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8:5) and a little higher than the beasts. Like a pendulum he swings to and fro under the combined action of gravity and momentum, of the gravitation of selfishness and the momentum of the

⁶⁸Heschel, Passion for Truth, xiv.

⁶⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 341.

⁷⁰Ibid.

divine, of a vision beheld by God in the darkness of flesh and blood.⁷¹

He contends the human condition is evidenced daily in the person's wavering between animality and divinity, between that which is more and that which is less than humanity.⁷² Even here, however, the point is to live the tension, never ultimately to separate the polar opposites as each gives meaning to the other.

Image and Dust

Heschel points out that the inherent duality in human beings is expressed most emphatically in the first two chapters of Genesis which alternately describe the human as having been created in the *image and likeness* of God and as having been formed *out of the dust* of the earth.

Together, *image* and *dust* express the polarity of the nature of man. Man is formed of the most inferior stuff in the most superior image.⁷³

Without being a disparagement of the earth that the creator identifies as good, *dust* nonetheless does connote a certain humility, insignificance, and the "spiritual feebleness" that makes the human person's "affinity with God" more amazing, although not necessarily "an eternal contradiction." Heschel points out that unlike the other creatures that either were formed of the ground or brought forth from the earth, humankind was made of arid dust, "the stuff of the desert, which is both abundant and worthless."⁷⁴ Heschel explains:

There is dignity to dust which, just as heaven, was created by God. There is,

⁷¹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 211.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 210.

⁷³Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man," in Insecurity of Freedom, 156.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

indeed, meaning and blessing in having been formed of the dust of the earth, for it is only because he is formed of the dust of the earth that man can fulfill his destiny to cultivate the earth.⁷⁵

Heschel emphasizes that humankind “came into being by a special act of creation.”⁷⁶ That is, humans are not merely the products of the earth, an organic part of nature as are other life forms. They are artifacts of God. Most important and distinctive of all, Heschel reminds us, is the fact that God not only created but formed humankind, bringing humans into being in the most intimately dynamic fashion imaginable.

God ‘blew into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being’ (2:7) Something of His very self God placed in man, so that he owes his existence not to the forces of nature but to the Creator of all. Man is set apart from both the plants and the beasts by the fact of God being directly involved in his coming into being. . . Thus the statement that man was made out of dust stresses not only his fragility but also his nobility.⁷⁷

Therefore, for Heschel, the duality within humans does not necessitate an eternal contradiction. He claims that the polarity is not an innate contradiction, but rather expresses the Jewish understanding of free will in human beings and becomes apparent in human choice. He writes:

Unlike the Pythagoreans, the Bible does not regard the body as the sepulcher and prisonhouse of the soul or even as the seat and source of sin. The contradiction is in what man does with his soul and body. The contradiction lies in his acts rather than in his substance. As nature is not the counterwork of God but His creation and instrument, dust is not the contradiction of the image but its foil and complement.⁷⁸

It becomes clear, for Heschel the human person’s uniqueness lies in being a mysterious

⁷⁵Ibid., 157.

⁷⁶Ibid., 156.

⁷⁷Ibid., 156-57.

⁷⁸Ibid., 157.

celestial and terrestrial mixture, “a knot in which heaven and earth are interlaced.”⁷⁹ He maintains that the dust humans are made of signals their candidacy for forgiveness and that their divine likeness alludes to the righteous living that is expected of them.⁸⁰

Heschel notes that ironically in the Bible the terms *tselem* and *demuth*, the words for image and likeness respectively, are almost always used in a derogatory sense, helping to accentuate that God is God and humans are human. Taken literally, the words “in the image and likeness of God” are absurd, while figuratively, they “conceal more than they reveal.” Yet, obscure as the meaning of “these momentous words” are that have continually baffled Bible readers, Heschel contends they do “denote something *unearthly*” and successfully convey that humankind “partakes of an unearthly divine sort of being.”⁸¹ These words suggest not that humans bear a resemblance to the divine by way of particular attributes or qualities. Nor do they refer to “the best part” in humans or to what contemporary parlance would identify as “the divine spark” within each person.⁸² Instead, Heschel emphasizes,

It is the whole man and every man who was made in the image and likeness of God. It is both body and soul, sage and fool, saint and sinner, man in his joy and in his grief, in his righteousness and wickedness. The image is not in man; it is man.⁸³

Heschel claims that according to Jewish tradition, the declaration that God created humankind in God’s own image and likeness is “the fundamental statement about the

⁷⁹Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 211.

⁸⁰Heschel, “Sacred Image of Man,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 158.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 152.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 152-53.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 152.

nature and meaning of man.”⁸⁴ But he clarifies that

It is only in the light of what the biblical man thinks of God, namely, a Being who created heaven and earth, the God of absolute justice and compassion, the master of nature and history who transcends nature and history, that the idea of man having been created in the image of God refers to the supreme mystery of man, of his nature and existence.⁸⁵

It is what Heschel calls “the supreme mystery of man” or elsewhere “the sacred image of man” that not only most distinguishes humankind but also makes incomplete any philosophical anthropology that attempts to define the human person without taking this into account.

The book, Who Is Man? is Heschel’s most succinct and cogent philosophical statement of the meaning of being human. It is an expanded version of a series of lectures he gave at Stanford in 1963. In it, Heschel laments the tendency to reduce persons to their facticity, defining humans by *what* they are or do rather than by *who* they are and can be. He challenges the use of scientific models to define humans and to understand human existence. Heschel maintains that these “definitions betray a deep inclination to conceive of man as a being made in the image of the animal,” whereas he insists a true understanding of the human person demands that human beings be understood in human terms.⁸⁶ Heschel contends that the zoomorphic conception of humankind, employed by Aristotle and explicitly or implicitly still holding sway today is descriptively inadequate and “distorts as much as it clarifies.”⁸⁷ Whereas it helps situate the human’s place in the physical universe, it fails to account for the “infinite differences” between humans and

⁸⁴Ibid., 150.

⁸⁵Ibid., 151.

⁸⁶Heschel, Who Is Man?, 20.

⁸⁷Ibid., 23.

the highest of animals.⁸⁸ “We can attain adequate understanding of man,” Heschel says, “only if we think of man in human terms, *more humano*, and abstain from employing categories developed in the investigation of lower life forms.”⁸⁹

In addition to the zoomorphic conception of humans, Heschel mourns the more damaging and demeaning but increasingly acceptable post-industrial tendency for humans to view others not merely as “tool making animal[s]” but as machines (*homo machina*). Given that our images have the power to affect our basic attitudes as well as to reveal them, Heschel warns of the danger of conceiving of persons as sophisticated, rational animals, as human machines, or worse yet, as the source of soap cakes, lampshades, and medium-sized nails, as did the reference books used by the evil practitioners of Nazism. Heschel warns:

As descriptions of one of many aspects of the nature of man, these definitions may indeed be correct. But when pretending to express his essential meaning, they contribute to the liquidation of man’s self-understanding. And the liquidation of the self-understanding of man may lead to the self-extinction of man.⁹⁰

The danger of viewing humans as a kind of animal is that people begin to justify treating others as animals, that is, begin mistreating them, demeaning themselves as they desecrate another. The danger of viewing humans as machines is that people start treating others as machines. Machines are things, artificial constructs invented and assembled by humans. They are only as good as their productivity and what can be put together can be taken apart. Machines are inventions, cared for as long as they are useful, and

⁸⁸Heschel, “The Patient as a Person,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 24.

⁸⁹Heschel, Who Is Man?, 3.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 25.

replaceable. Humans are a mystery, precious and irreplaceable.⁹¹

Heschel has no problem acknowledging “animality” in human beings. “The animality of man we can grasp with a fair degree of clarity,” he says. “The perplexity begins when we attempt to make clear what is meant by the *humanity* of man.”⁹² In the shadow that stretches a long distance from Auschwitz and Treblinka, Heschel grieves, “Today it is the humanity of man that is no longer self-evident.”⁹³ More critical than understanding their animality is for humans to discover their humanity in light of their divine affinity, in light of the fact that they are a sacred image of the divine.

Transcendent Dignity

Biblical testimony, Heschel insists, is that despite the insignificance of humanity compared with the grandeur of God, God deems humankind exceedingly significant.⁹⁴ The human person “occupies a unique status.”⁹⁵ This status, as well as the quest for understanding the human, begins with the biblical premise that humans are the image of God (in Hebrew, *tselem elohim*, in Latin, *imago Dei*). Perhaps the only conviction Heschel holds dearer than the sacred significance of human beings is the belief that God is passionately concerned about and personally invested in the plight of humankind. We will address the pathos of God extensively in Chapter Six. Suffice it to say here, these twin ideas—the sacred image of humanity and divine pathos—indicate the source,

⁹¹Sherwin, Abraham Joshua Heschel, 27.

⁹²Heschel, Who Is Man?, 3.

⁹³Friedman, You Are My Witnesses, 75.

⁹⁴Heschel, “Sacred Image of Man,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 161-62.

⁹⁵Heschel, Man is Not Alone, 207.

magnitude, and responsibility of humankind's transcendent dignity. *Imago Dei*, therefore, suggests both a divine initiation and a human fecundity, a theological ontology and an ethical anthropology, a divine inheritance and a human assignment, an eternal nobility and an immanent responsibility.

To say, "the transcendent dignity of humans," is, in a few words, to allude to the implications of the most important and underlying polarity at the root of religious existence, namely, the polarity between God and humanity.⁹⁶ For Heschel, polarity does not refer to two static entities on opposite ends of a spectrum. As touched on briefly above, polarity not only signals opposites but also relationship, interaction, creative tension. As we will see later, Heschel insists each needs the other to be what or who it is.

Man without God is a conclusion without a premise. God without mankind is a king without a kingdom. Man without God is a creature without a creator. Without man, there is no being to embody the image of God.⁹⁷

This interrelationship, this co-existence between God and humanity may not represent an ontologically mutual dependence, but according to Heschel it does indicate the requirement of mutual responsibility. The Jewish concept of *covenant*—the committed relationship between God and humanity—most fully represents this divine-human drama. Looked at from the perspective of the human toward the divine, it means that the sacred image of the human is dependent on and proof of divine pathos. Franklin Sherman spells out the implications of viewing oneself as the image of God and the world as created by a God who cares. "If he [i.e. the human person] acknowledges that at the root of reality there is a living God, then he is challenged to understand himself in terms of the fullest

⁹⁶Sherwin, Abraham Joshua Heschel, 23.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 23-24.

livingness, and to shape his life in accordance with the nature of this God.”⁹⁸

The divine-human interplay, its intentionality, intimacy, and intensity is at the core of Heschel’s understanding of God and what it means to be human. Heschel illuminates the transcendent dignity of the image of God by identifying several capacities expressive of what is unique to the essence of being human.

Self-knowledge is a specific indication of this human uniqueness. Put succinctly, Heschel says:

And the first answer to the question: Who is man? is that he is a being who asks questions concerning himself. It is in asking such questions that man discovers that he is a person, and it is the kind of questions he asks that reveals his condition.⁹⁹

To think of humans in human terms is to acknowledge and celebrate human persons’ desire and capacity for reflecting on their own reality, for considering their own beingness, as well as the meaning of that being. Heschel notes:

Sensitivity to one’s own behavior, the ability to question it, to regard it as a problem rather than as a structure consisting exclusively of irreducible, immutable and ultimate facts, is an essential quality of being human.¹⁰⁰

Especially significant for Heschel is the human’s ability to exegete their existence, to question what it is over against what it can be, to consider who they are in light of an intuitive sense of who they ought to be.¹⁰¹ He explains:

The problem of man is occasioned by our coming upon a conflict or contradiction between existence and expectation. Thus the root of self-understanding is in the awareness of the self as a problem; it operates as critical reflection. Displacement of complacency, questioning the self, its acts and traits, is the primary motivation

⁹⁸Sherman, *Promise of Heschel*, 39.

⁹⁹Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 28.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 5.

of self-understanding.¹⁰²

Given that self-reflection and self-understanding are expressive of the essence of being human, what humans think of themselves is pivotal. A “theory of man,” says Heschel, “shapes and affects its subject. Statements about man magnetize the inner space of man. We not only describe the ‘nature’ of man, we fashion it. We become what we think of ourselves.”¹⁰³

The implication of being human as well as of being a sacred image is that we not only occupy physical space, but have the capacity to seek authentic existence “in an inner space.”¹⁰⁴ Humans possess “a boundless, unpredictable capacity for the development of an inner universe,” says Heschel.¹⁰⁵ *Imago Dei* precedes human thought and makes it possible. Descartes had it backwards. It is not, “I think, therefore I am.” It is rather, in Heschel’s view, “I am, therefore I think.”

For Heschel, there is a truth about humans even more significant than their human capacity for self-knowledge that is also another sign of the sacred dignity of the human person, namely, the inestimable honor of being known. For Heschel, to be human is *to be known*. That humans think is the gracious result of first having been thought. That humans know anything is the result of originally having been known.¹⁰⁶ The innate dignity of the human person, he asserts, is evidenced not only by their ability to know, but more so by their capacity to be known, especially and in particular, to be known by

¹⁰²Ibid., 12.

¹⁰³Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 39.

¹⁰⁶Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 129.

God.¹⁰⁷

This way of thinking about the human person is a reversal of the common tendency to conceive of the human being primarily as an actor, a knower, a mental gatherer and arranger of information. In the divine-human relationship, it is different. The human is first, the acted upon, the known. Heschel stresses, “God is neither a thing or an idea;” not an object among other objects that we convert into a mental concept and possess in our minds. Consequently, neither the roots of religion nor its experience and practice are reducible to thinking about God or the things of God. He states:

Thinking about God is totally different from thinking about all other matters; to apply the usual logical devices would be like trying to blow away a tempest with a breath. . . . To think of God is not to find Him as an object in our minds, but to find ourselves in Him. Religion begins where experience ends, and the end of experience is a perception of our being perceived.¹⁰⁸

Faith, for Heschel, as we shall see in detail later, is not the result of discursive thinking. It is not intellectual assent given to a mental construct called God, but rather the response of the whole person to mystery shot through with meaning.¹⁰⁹ The mystery and meaning, revealed as a living presence, recognizes, addresses, and calls for an answer from humans. No longer conceived of as the object of human thought, God is experienced as the divine Subject who imagines and considers us. “The religious man,” says Heschel, “has . . . an awareness of being known by God, as if he were an object, a thought in His

¹⁰⁷This idea is reminiscent of something another great spiritual master, Thomas Merton, wrote, “The root of Christian love is not the will to love, but *the faith that one is loved*. The faith that one is loved by God. That faith that one is loved by God although unworthy—or, rather, irrespective of one’s worth!” Merton, New Seeds, 75.

¹⁰⁸Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 127.

¹⁰⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 117.

mind.”¹¹⁰ Heschel continues:

To the philosopher God is an *object*, to men at prayer He is the *subject*. Their aim is not to possess Him as a concept of knowledge, to be informed about Him, as if He were a fact among facts. What they crave for is to be wholly possessed by Him, to be an object of His knowledge and to sense it. The task is not to know the unknown but to be penetrated with it; *not to know* but *to be known* to Him, to expose ourselves to Him rather than Him to us; not to judge and to assert but to listen and to be judged by Him.”¹¹¹

Religion is the expression of our awareness of being a thought in the mind of God.

Even more contrary to classical thought and more essential to Heschel’s construal of human being and of the divine-human relationship than the notion that to be human is to be known by God, is the conviction that God needs humankind. What this discloses about God and Heschel’s understanding of God, will be addressed in Chapter Four and again in Chapter Six. I briefly indicate here its significance for humans. Over against his criticism of the contemporary propensity for reducing religion to the satisfaction of needs, is Heschel’s assertion that to be human is *to be needed by God*. Rooted in the biblical and prophetic traditions, as well as found in Jewish mysticism, especially Lurianic Kabbalah, this idea, which shares a close kinship to Heschel’s “fundamental and revolutionary doctrine of divine pathos,”¹¹² is key to his conception of human existence and to his understanding of Jewish piety as a particular mode of living. Humankind’s ability to live lives that are compatible with their divinely rooted dignity is determined by whether or not they view and live their lives as the selfish quest to satisfy personal needs or as the humble and awe-filled agreement “to satisfy a divine need.”¹¹³ The prophets, as

¹¹⁰Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 128.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 130.

¹¹³Heschel, “Idols in the Temples,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 67.

well as the Hasidim, certainly among the most formative figures in Heschel's life, preach and practice the latter option. They represent the biblical perspective in contrast to modern mass media, which Heschel claims, peddles the former option, promoting the philosophy that happiness depends upon sparing no effort to gratify our needs. In light of this, Sherman, in his study on Heschel, comments:

The prophets . . . teach us that man's greatness is to be found in the fact that he *is needed* for something that transcends him. The Eternal God himself needs man for the effecting of his purposes in the world and true fulfillment is to be found in the free, acceptance of these purposes and the realignment of one's life so as to accord with them.¹¹⁴

The uniqueness of the human person is epitomized in the fact that humankind's "destiny is to be a need."¹¹⁵ The challenge is to convert our energy and the desire to satisfy all our temporal needs into the awareness that our lives are the answers to a higher call, to a holy need. But living in agreement with this consciousness, we satisfy this transcendent need. "Our needs are temporal," says Heschel, "while our being needed is lasting."¹¹⁶

As we will see later, the appropriate response to divine involvement is our involvement with divine concerns. To be human Heschel maintains, is *to share God's concerns*. Again, the spiritual significance of the human person whose source lies in being an image of God comes not as an honorary degree but as an invitation and a responsibility to be what God needs humans to be. The most awesome tribute to the transcendent dignity of the human person is the opportunity and obligation *to be a partner of God*. The incomparable esteem with which God sees humans, and the commitment God makes to the covenant with humankind, is contained in this summons

¹¹⁴Sherman, Promise of Heschel, 42.

¹¹⁵Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 213.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

to partnership.

God takes man seriously. He enters a direct relationship with man, namely *a covenant*, to which not only man but also God is committed. . . . Essential to biblical religion is the *awareness of God's interest in man*, the awareness of a covenant, of a responsibility that lies on Him as well as on us. Our task is to concur with His interest, to carry out His vision of our task. God is in need of man for the attainment of His ends, and religion, as biblical tradition understands it, is a way to serve these ends."¹¹⁷

Heschel contends, 'the Bible maintains that the question about God is a question of God. . . . Man is being called upon, challenged, and solaced. God is in search of man, and life is something that requires an answer.'¹¹⁸ The art and spiritual significance of living, for Heschel, is the extent to which we agree to be the partners of God in the work of God in the world.

Akin to the signs of human uniqueness mentioned above is another capacity that comes from the essence of the human person: the concern for meaning. For Heschel, to be human is to care for meaning, to be open to a meaning-beyond-themselves, in other words, to be open to transcendence. Heschel writes:

The secret of being human is care for meaning. Man is not his own meaning, and if the essence of being human is concern for transcendent meaning, then man's secret lies in openness to transcendence. Existence is interspersed with suggestions of transcendence, and openness to transcendence is a constitutive element of being human.¹¹⁹

Although "the care for significant being is inherent in being human," Heschel points out that "the quest for ultimate relevance of being is a response to a requiredness of existence: not something derived from human nature, but something that constitutes

¹¹⁷Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 74-75.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 74.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 66.

the nature of being human.”¹²⁰ In other words, activating or acting on the human concern for meaning is not a given but an option, a choice not a guarantee. “Human being is either coming into meaning or betraying it,” says Heschel.¹²¹ He states:

The meaning of existence is not naturally given; it is not an endowment but an art. It rather depends on whether we respond or refuse to respond to God who is in search of man; it is either fulfilled or missed.

Man’s anxiety about meaning is not a question, an impulse, but an answer, a response to a challenge.¹²²

To live lives of true spiritual significance requires “not only confronting the world” but also “confronting the soul,” and the modern person often would rather avoid and ignore the deep questions necessary for and involved in becoming human.¹²³ In a penetrating observation, Heschel claims that ultimate questions have become the object of people’s “favorite unawareness.”¹²⁴

What is at stake for Heschel if persons fail to ask ultimate questions is nothing less than “the meaning of life.” Not to pursue answers to ultimate questions is to risk living a meaningless life, that is, a life dedicated to partial objectives resulting in a life without meaning and meanings without life. He asserts:

Human being . . . is either devoid of, or indicative of, ultimate meaning . . . and only a life that is concretely expressed as an orientation toward transcendence, where transcendence is understood as the living God, is capable of delivering transcendent meaning.¹²⁵

¹²⁰Ibid., 64-65.

¹²¹Ibid., 51.

¹²²Ibid., 74.

¹²³Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 191.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Heschel, Who Is Man?, 63.

Ultimate meaning that exists only as an idea and in the realm of abstraction and never translates into human living will never quell human anxiety. In Heschel's view, the inclination for meaning is an innate predisposition toward transcendence that is an allusion to transcendent presence calling for human responsiveness. Thus, the search for meaning is really a search for relationship, and not just any relationship. Heschel states:

The cry for meaning is a cry for ultimate relationship, for ultimate belonging. . . . Is there a Presence to live by? A Presence worth living for, worth dying for? Is there a way of living in the Presence? Is there a way of living compatible with the Presence? . . . unless ultimate meaning is related to me, I am not related to meaning.

Man is in need of meaning, but if ultimate meaning is not in need of man, and he cannot relate himself to it, then ultimate meaning is meaningless to him.¹²⁶

In characteristic fashion, Heschel turns the idea of meaning around by arguing that to come at the essence of being human by asking the question, "What is the meaning of being human?" is to approach from the wrong direction. The meaning of being human, for Heschel, is determined and illuminated by the biblical, prophetic, mystical, and Hasidic understanding of the meaning of God. The meaning of being human is realized in being the *object* of the divine *Subject*. Heschel notes:

The Greeks formulated the search for meaning as man in search of a thought; the Hebrews formulated the search for meaning as God's thought (or concern) in search of man.¹²⁷

Heschel is emphatic that "the pursuit of meaning is meaningless, unless there is a meaning in pursuit of man."¹²⁸ What makes life meaningful, according to Heschel, is not our quest for meaning, but the fact that God is meaning in search of us. What makes persons human is dependent upon their awareness "that something divine is at stake in

¹²⁶Ibid., 73.

¹²⁷Ibid., 74.

¹²⁸Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man," 163.

[their] existence.”¹²⁹

Expressions of the essence of the human person, characterized by the ability for self-reflection, the capacity and privilege of being known and needed by God, the honor and responsibility of being a partner of God and sharing God’s concerns, the inherent care for relating personal meaning to a transpersonal meaning, and the opportunity to be open to transcendence, are intricately woven together to form one seamless garment. They are variations on a theme, and the theme is to be-toward-grandeur, even to reach-beyond-grandeur, grandeur understood here as the mystery beyond ourselves. The theme is the capacity to surpass the self, to become holy, to become who we are: images of God. This is what Heschel means when he says: “In order for man to be a man, man must be more than a man.”¹³⁰

Modes of Being Human

In his book, Who Is Man? Heschel presents what he considers the “fundamentals of human existence.” He suggests they are not simply arbitrary or random impressions, but rather “necessary components which constitute the essence of being human.” Heschel contends that although realizing these “modes of being” is not a guarantee, “they emerge as manifestly true when a person begins to ponder the latent substance of his self-understanding.”¹³¹ He lists the following features as essential modes of authentic living: preciousness, uniqueness, opportunity, non-finality, the power to create events, the polarity between solitude and solidarity, reciprocity, and sensitivity to the sacred (or

¹²⁹Ibid., 160.

¹³⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 399.

¹³¹Heschel, Who Is Man?, 31-32.

sanctity).

Preciousness

One of Heschel's deepest convictions is that, as the sacred image of the divine, the human person especially enjoys grandeur and transcendent significance. He believes that although God is the source of all life forms, all entities animate and inanimate, only humanity is "intrinsically sacred, the only type of being we regard as supremely valuable."¹³² He refers to this intrinsic sacredness as preciousness. When experienced reflexively, it manifests itself as a sense of wonder at the mystery of one's own existence. It is epitomized in the psalmist's exclamation: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made!" (Psalm 139. 14 JB) Over against the common, base attitude that takes life for granted, Heschel proclaims, "each thing is a surprise, *being is unbelievable*. . . . We are amazed . . . *at the unexpectedness of being as such*, at the fact that there is being at all."¹³³ He states, "One can never recover from the surprise of just being here now."¹³⁴ Elsewhere Heschel elaborates:

In the eyes of the world, . . . I am an average man. But to my heart I am of great moment. The challenge I face is how to concretize the quiet eminence of my being.

Beyond all agony and anxiety lies the most important ingredient of self-reflection: the preciousness of my own existence. To my own heart my existence is unique, unprecedented, priceless, exceedingly precious, and I resist the thought of gambling away its meaning.¹³⁵

The heightened awareness not only that one is alive but that one is an incalculably

¹³²Ibid., 33.

¹³³Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 12.

¹³⁴Heschel, Who Is Man?, 30.

¹³⁵Ibid., 35.

precious human being who is alive, is what ultimately generates freedom.¹³⁶ It begins in wonder and in the grateful awareness that “the truth of human being is the love of being alive.”¹³⁷ Residing in our sacred origin, in being a divine likeness, preciousness culminates in responsible living.

When the preciousness of the human is sensed in another, it is experienced not as a perception but as an encounter: “A thing we perceive, a person we meet,” Heschel asserts.¹³⁸ All human relationships, our behavior toward and treatment of others, whether courteous or irreverent, are the natural extension of how we first know and experience ourselves. The conviction of one’s own dignity, rooted not in a comparison with others but in *imago Dei*, is the foundation of morality. It presents itself as both divine oblation and human obligation. Preciousness leaves us with the questions: “How should I live the life that I am?”¹³⁹ “How should a being created in the likeness of God act, think, feel? How should we live in a way which is compatible with our being a likeness of God?”¹⁴⁰

Uniqueness

One does not encounter Heschel’s work without sensing his obvious awe at the innate dignity of each human life. For Heschel, preciousness and uniqueness are twin sensibilities essential to being human. Whereas preciousness refers to the innate, inestimable worth of the human person, uniqueness signifies the singularity of each

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid., 33.

¹³⁹Ibid., 36.

¹⁴⁰Heschel, “Idols in the Temples,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 59.

human person. Heschel states:

It is through the awareness that I am not only an everybody that I evolve as a self, as somebody, as a person, as something that cannot be repeated, something for which there is no duplicate, no substitute.¹⁴¹

Heschel insists there is no such thing as an average person. Human being cannot be reduced to a lowest common denominator nor be measured by mean and standard deviation. There is nothing run of the mill about anyone. Bearing things in common with others, ultimately no human being is like another. To disregard a human being's uniqueness is fundamentally to demean and distort that person. Heschel says it this way:

My existence as an event is original, not a copy. No two human beings are alike. . . Every human being has something to say, to think, or to do which is unprecedented. It is the crust, the make-up, the conformity, that tends to reduce existence to a generality.

Being human is a novelty—not a mere repetition or extension of the past, but an anticipation of things to come. Being human is a surprise, not a foregone conclusion. A person has a capacity to create events. Every person is a disclosure, an example of exclusiveness.¹⁴²

Heschel points to the human face in order to accentuate the inimitable quality of the person. No two human visages are alike and each face itself is a constantly changing message. The human face, “a synonym for the incarnation of uniqueness,” expresses a deep truth: I am shockingly, delightfully, mysteriously singular. For Heschel, singularity is a dimension easily forgotten and threatened by a mentality of wholesaleness, of sheer continuity. Heschel alleges “being human consists of outbursts of singularity” and maintains the uniqueness of the human emerges in moments.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹Heschel, Who Is Man?, 35.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 38.

Opportunity

Heschel emphasizes that whereas human being is fixed and certain, beginning at birth and ending inevitably with death, being human is unpredictable and open ended. Not a predetermined, knowable straight passage, being human is an intricate maze persons are invited and required to negotiate daily and through which they come-into-being. This labyrinth is what we refer to as the inner life. One of the distinguishing features of human existence, according to Heschel, is the unpredictable capacity to develop an inner life.¹⁴⁴

However, because becoming human is not a set structure but rather “an exuberance that goes on, frequently defying pattern, rule, and form,” this labyrinth with its twists and turns, intersections and switchbacks, must be negotiated anew each day.¹⁴⁵ Human beings equipped only with their own compasses are prone to go astray. Yet they are enhanced, not deprived by these challenges. Consequently, humans need a worthy guide. Heschel advises: “the inner life is a maze, and no one can find his way through or about without guidance.”¹⁴⁶

For Heschel, possibility and opportunity are more telling and more illuminative of the human person than raw, observable facts. Heschel states:

Since the outstanding mark of a man is the superiority of the possibilities of his being over the actuality of his being, we must not confine our understanding to what he is in his facticity. We must look beyond the facts in order to do justice to him. Man must be understood as a complex of opportunities, as well as a bundle of facts.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 39.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 40.

“Being human,” insists Heschel, “is an opportunity as well as a fact.”¹⁴⁸ Humans are called upon to be more than what they are.¹⁴⁹

Non-Finality

If opportunity refers to the unpredictability and futurity of being human, then non-finality refers to the potentiality and incompleteness of being human. The complexity of the inner landscape of persons suggests that the human person is never fixed or final, but instead always in flux. “Finality and humanity seem to be mutually exclusive,” says Heschel.¹⁵⁰ There is no “definitive edition” of the human being. Human living is always open-ended, always undetermined from moment to moment. “Man’s outstanding quality,” Heschel claims, “is in his being a surprise.”¹⁵¹

It is a fatal illusion to assume that to be human is a fact given with human being rather than a goal and an achievement.

To animals the world is what it is; to man this is a world in the making, and being human means being on the way, striving, waiting, hoping.¹⁵²

When Heschel says of the human being, “anything is possible,” he means that the human person is continually being fired and shaped in the smithy of inner contradictions: between compliance and restiveness, conformity and rebelliousness, captivity and insurgency.¹⁵³ Potentiality is the latent dimension of human living. The qualities of being

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 42.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 40.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 40-41.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 41.

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³Ibid.

human do not come freely but are hard won. They have to be “achieved, cultivated, and protected.”¹⁵⁴

Life is an Event

The eventful nature of life, the mode of being that conveys human life as a volitional happening, is closely related to and overlaps with opportunity and non-finality. Over against the view of life as a natural organic process, Heschel stresses that life for humans is “an incalculable series of occasions and events.”¹⁵⁵ In addition, he emphasizes the special ingredient in human existence, namely, “the power to create an event.”¹⁵⁶ Humans have the capacity to take initiative and to make things happen. “To be human is to intend, to decide, to challenge, not merely to go on, to react, to be an effect,” says Heschel.¹⁵⁷ Authentic human living is not a given, but a precarious adventure in constant need of attention, cultivation. It invites and requires intentional responses. It is more than a process that consists of regularity, continuity, and a typically predictable and permanent pattern to which one passively gives in. Rather, life is “a moment that happens; not a process but a sequence of acts or events.”¹⁵⁸ It is a spiritual order typified by its irregularity and extraordinariness. Says Heschel:

Life lived as an event is a drama. Life reduced to a process becomes vegetation. The awareness of life as a drama comes about as a result of knowing that one has a part to play, of realizing that the self is unprecedented and of

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 42.

¹⁵⁵Sherman, Promise of Heschel, 52.

¹⁵⁶Heschel, Who Is Man?, 44.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 42.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

refusing to regard existence as a waste.¹⁵⁹

Solitude and Solidarity

As I mentioned earlier, according to Heschel, polarity is an intrinsic characteristic of human existence and therefore appears in many areas of human life, not simply in the tension between good and evil, or the seesaw between animality and divinity. For example, at the heart of human existence are the dual pulls of solitude and solidarity. "There is no dignity without the ability to stand alone," asserts Heschel, who also contends, "For man *to be* means *to be with* other human beings."¹⁶⁰

Whereas Heschel stresses the existential need to be able to stand alone and to stand apart, to be able to be different and to resist cowardice disguised as compliance, to take the time to withdraw and be still in order to hear, he claims:

The truth, however, is that man is never alone. It is together with all my contemporaries that I live, suffer, and rejoice, even while living in seclusion. Genuine solitude is not discarding but distilling humanity.¹⁶¹

For Heschel, human *being*, as faithful participation in the divine life, is by definition transitive. Genuine solitude elicits genuine solidarity. Authentic existence is either coexistence or nonexistence.¹⁶² Heschel states:

Human solidarity is not the product of being human; being human is the product of human solidarity. Indeed, even the most personal concern, the search for meaning, is utterly meaningless as a pursuit of personal salvation.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 44.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 44-45.

¹⁶²Ibid., 45.

¹⁶³Ibid.

Meaning that is not shared is meaningless. To be human is not merely to be but to be in relationship, not to be self-sufficient but to be in community.

Reciprocity

Kin to the experience of solidarity is the expression of reciprocity. Authentic human living means learning the importance of both giving and receiving. Heschel points out that the desire to obtain and seize things we care for characterizes infancy and childhood, whereas mature adulthood is evidenced by the desire to give and to provide for those we care for.¹⁶⁴ Heschel notes,

“We receive continually; our very being is a gift in the form of an enigma; a breath of fresh air is inhalation of grace. Fullness of existence, personal being is achieved by what we offer in return.”¹⁶⁵

Human living that does not know reciprocity is a pretense. The human person only becomes a person as they engage in the give and take of life, as they appreciate the gratuitousness of receiving and the necessity of returning. “The dignity of human existence is in the power to reciprocate.”¹⁶⁶ Heschel continues:

To be a person is to reciprocate, to offer in return for what one receives. Reciprocity involves appreciation. . . . I become a person by knowing the meaning of receiving and giving. I become a person when I begin to reciprocate.¹⁶⁷

For human beings to actualize their humanity they must enter into life as a dynamic interaction, as a personal and holy exchange. The holiest exchange is the one between God and humanity, since its initiation is the fullest expression of divine

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 46.

¹⁶⁵Ibid.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

graciousness and its response is the fullest expression of human indebtedness to transcendent requiredness. As involvement with humanity is the epitome of divine pathos, indebtedness to God is the pathos of being human. Heschel reminds us, because “what we own, we owe,” fullness of life is known only in the conscious act of offering in return. The human failure to reciprocate the divine when the gift of life is so unnecessary, is humanity’s greatest shame and a source of our deep, albeit unidentified, anxiety.

How embarrassing for man to be the greatest miracle on earth and not to understand it! How embarrassing for man to live in the shadow of greatness and to ignore it, to be a contemporary of God and not to sense it.¹⁶⁸

Giving in return acknowledges our awareness of and our appreciation for having first received.

Sanctity

Another essential mode of being human that Heschel identifies is sanctity. Sanctity begins with the realization of the preciousness of life. Not only human life but all life is precious, all of reality is a reflection of sanctity. However, for Heschel, only humans can be holy. As stated above, he assigns humans a special status, identifying them as the only being with whom sanctity is associated. “Being human,” says Heschel, “involves being sensitive to the sacred.”¹⁶⁹ Sanctity is not something people achieve, not something they can bestow upon themselves but only something freely and imperceptively given to them as they become more sensitive to the sacred. It is not given as a reward nor as an external object one can possess but rather as the secret gift of human becoming when persons live lives commensurate to the sacredness of their image.

¹⁶⁸Heschel, Who Is Man?, 112.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 48.

Sanctity is realized especially by responding faithfully to the invitation to be God's partner.

Holy living means to be a witness to the Holy, to assist the divine, to be a symbol of God. Sanctity involves learning what is "dear to God" and holding it as precious for oneself. Ultimately, it is only in learning to recognize, appreciate, and cultivate sanctity in one's own living that persons are able to see it and respond to it in others.

Being Human: The Task of Human Being

Let me make clear an essential dimension of Heschel's anthropology, a central conviction that up to this point has been mentioned but not emphatically spelled out: there is a qualitative difference between human being and being human. Heschel captures the difference: "I am born a human being; what I have to acquire is being human."¹⁷⁰ This difference is the reason Heschel titled his lectures and subsequent book, Who Is Man? and not What is Man? Heschel's anthropology is based upon the assertion that

the category of human is not simply derived from the category of being. The attribute "human" in the term "human being" is not an accidental quality, added to the essence of his being. It is the essence. Human being demands being human.¹⁷¹

It is important to note that human being can only demand being human because, for Heschel, human life and living are fundamentally religious in nature. Paradoxically, the divine element in human existence is what enables the word "human" to refer to the essence of "human being." It is God (and not just any God but the God of pathos), as Heschel asserts, who infuses the word human with nobility and meaning and in whose image persons are made.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 26.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 29.

Heschel stresses that whereas human being is a given, a biological fact, being human is a vocation, task, responsibility, and destiny. "Human being," says Heschel, "is a disclosure of the divine. The grandeur of human being is revealed in the power of being human."¹⁷² Human being is a reality. Being human is an opportunity. Human being is an actuality. Being human is a possibility and a surprise. The former is a known fact, the latter "is always a trial, full of risk, precarious," "an incalculable series of moments and acts."¹⁷³ The opportunity to become human is simultaneously our greatest inheritance and privilege, and our greatest responsibility and challenge.

The difference between human being and being human is rooted in the biblical view of the human person as "image of God." It only becomes apparent as persons discover the divine gratuity and human responsibility inherent in this multifarious term. To be the image of God minimally means that we are more than just a biological entity, "a mass of protoplasm, a complicated robot, a tool-making animal."¹⁷⁴ According to the Torah, humans were divinely spoken and breathed into being and, therefore, there is something sacred at stake in human existence. To be the image of God means that the teleology of human being is theological in nature. Being human implies "a direction of being."¹⁷⁵ To be the image of God means that God is both the source of our dignity and the goal that lies beyond our self. "What is spiritual dignity?" asks Heschel. He answers: "The attachment of the soul to a goal that lies beyond the self, a goal not within but

¹⁷²Heschel, "The Patient as a Person," in Insecurity of Freedom, 25.

¹⁷³Heschel, Who Is Man?, 42-43.

¹⁷⁴Heschel, "Jewish Education," in Insecurity of Freedom, 224.

¹⁷⁵Heschel, Who Is Man?, 53.

beyond the self.”¹⁷⁶ In this sense, religious living always follows the path of return as the goal and the source are revealed to be one and the same. T.S. Eliot describes this discovery in the fourth quartet, “Little Gidding,” of his poem The Four Quartets:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.¹⁷⁷

Thus from the human perspective becoming human is by nature a going home, and from the perspective of the divine is a coming home.

As Heschel indicates, the modes of being expounded upon above are less descriptive of normative human behavior than they are prescriptive for those who try to actualize the depths of their humanity. For Heschel, “the essence of man is not in what he is, but in what he is able to be.”¹⁷⁸ Being human requires that persons activate the potentiality that dwells within them. Heschel suggests, “Perhaps the most amazing aspect about man is what is latent in him”¹⁷⁹

Fundamental to Heschel’s view of the person is that it is only in the realm of human living that being human takes place or makes any sense. He states:

In speaking about human being we have in mind a being very much alive. Living is a situation, the content of which is much richer than the concept of being. . . . We must always keep in mind that it is the *living* man we seek to understand when we speak of the human being: human being as human living. Man’s most important problem is not being but living.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶Heschel, God in Search of Man, 399; Who Is Man?, 39.

¹⁷⁷T.S. Eliot, Collected Poems: 1909-1962 (New York:: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963), 208.

¹⁷⁸Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 209.

¹⁷⁹Heschel, “The Patient as a Person,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 25.

¹⁸⁰Heschel, Who Is Man?, 68.

Heschel is not interested in “sheer being.” That is a fallacy, an abstraction. He is concerned about the human *being human*. “In the actual human situation,” says Heschel, “‘to be’ is inseparable from ‘how to be.’”¹⁸¹ According to Heschel, it is not only quite possible but tragically quite prevalent for humans to “continue to be without being human.”

One of the most frightening prospects we must face is that this earth may be populated by a race of beings which, though belonging to the race of *homo sapiens* according to biology, will be devoid of the qualities by which man is spiritually distinguished from the rest of organic creatures.¹⁸²

The fundamental question, for Heschel, is whether our humanity is coming into being or whether we betray it.¹⁸³ Being human is not something we finally achieve or a final destination where we arrive at last. It means to commit oneself daily to sanctify life, consciously choosing life in small and large ways. Heschel maintains, “Man has to choose between awe and anxiety, between the divine and the demonic, between radical amazement and radical despair.”¹⁸⁴ In this sense, to speak of being “fully” human is a misnomer as being human is an intentional and grace-filled development, a continual unfolding not a final product. When I use the term “fully human” I do so for emphasis in order to distinguish it from passive human being. I mean it as the conscious effort to exercise the eminence of our being not as a synonym for human perfection. Awareness of this distinction is paramount for caregivers who are called and committed to their own growth and to support human becoming in others.

¹⁸¹Ibid., 47; “The Patient as a Person,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 27.

¹⁸²Ibid., 29.

¹⁸³Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 51.

¹⁸⁴Heschel, “Children and Youth,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 48.

Heschel holds that the human vocation is not merely how to “come into being, but how to come into meaning.”¹⁸⁵ As noted above, he stresses that the task of being human involves relating being to meaning, and relating meaning to the transcendent. Heschel asserts that “personal meaning is meaningless, unless it is related to a transpersonal meaning.”¹⁸⁶ John Merkle, in his comprehensive study of Rabbi Heschel’s work, says it this way: “Only a personal reality may serve as the ultimate transcendent meaning for another person.”¹⁸⁷ Thus “the cry for meaning,” Heschel contends, “is a cry for ultimate relationship, for ultimate belonging.”¹⁸⁸ It is the human relationship to personal transcendence that makes both being and meaning meaningful, and living holy.

Another name for the human dimension of this incomparable relationship, for being seeking transcendent meaning, is holiness. For Heschel, human nobility resides not only in treating oneself and others as an image of God, but also in the fact that “the human can become holy.”¹⁸⁹ To come into being is to become both human and holy. Humanization is sanctification and sanctification is humanization. That which makes us holy makes us more human, and that which makes us human makes us more holy. Heschel insists that the aim of the human person is necessarily the aim of human living: “to live in a way which is compatible with the grandeur and mystery of living.”¹⁹⁰ To be holy is to be in awe before God, to be awake to wonder, and to be aware of and

¹⁸⁵Heschel, Who Is Man?, 67.

¹⁸⁶Heschel, “Idols in the Temples,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 65.

¹⁸⁷Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 62.

¹⁸⁸Heschel, Who Is Man?, 73.

¹⁸⁹Heschel, “Sacred Image of Man,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 156.

¹⁹⁰Heschel, Who Is Man?, 60.

compassionate toward those who suffer.

Let us now consider more fully this divine-human exchange and how it sets in motion the twin movements of humanization and sanctification.

CHAPTER 4

DIVINE OVERTURES AND HUMAN RESPONSES

The potential inherent in human beings comes, first, not from the fact that humans are in search of themselves, but rather from the prior and more fundamental truth: that “God [is] in search of man” to quote the title of one of Heschel’s major works. The central motif of Heschel’s writings is that humans are the object of God’s passionate, loving concern. God is in search of us. But how does God search? What is the method of this seek-and-find mission of God who is looking for us yet hidden or hidden yet looking for us? Conversely, what are the ways to His Presence?¹ Heschel’s answer to this existential query is that divine self-disclosure becomes gratuitously apparent and accessible to humans by means of the sublime, mystery, glory, and divine pathos especially as experienced in and through the Bible. These divine overtures (from the Latin *aperture*, an opening) suggest a transcendent presence, and in the case of glory and pathos, signal a desire and a readiness for relationship, for covenant. These dimensions of reality are openings through which we can perceive hints of the divine and encounter God. For Heschel, these suggestions and signs, and the subsequent human reply, are privileged ways to sense and experience God’s presence.

Heschel’s view of the dialectical nature of life does not simply refer to the polar nature of existence but implies an appropriate and required mode of human response to

¹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 24-32.

objective reality. Humans actualize the unparalleled nature of their being, of their vocation, by realizing the mystery and grandeur of the divine pursuit and by answering accordingly. The human quest for God is the response to the discovery that humans are the object of God's concern. That humanity's search for God is penultimate to and derivative of God's search for humanity in no way diminishes its importance or necessity. It complements and completes God's initiating search. Heschel insists, "God is waiting for man to seek Him."²

According to Heschel, "The Bible points to a way of understanding the world from the point of view of God," for as he claims in one of his trademark assertions,

The Bible is primarily not man's vision of God but God's vision of man. The Bible is not man's theology but God's anthropology, dealing with man and what He asks of him rather than with the nature of God.³

Heschel's understanding of religious existence, however poetically stated, is a comprehensive structuring of human life not only from the perspective of the Hebrew Bible, but also from the viewpoint of Jewish mysticism and Hasidism in which transcendental realities elicit a corresponding human reply: creation leads to recreation, brokenness elicits repair, the ineffable draws out wonder, mystery invites awe, the divine presence evokes faithful human presence, and divine pathos brings forth human sympathy. These responses, and the realities that evoke them, comprise what Heschel means by a biblical or religious view of reality. These hints and signs of the transcendent and the appropriate responses make up the divine-human exchange that marks the way persons become human and holy. They are the foundation and motivation for what I

²Ibid., 30.

³Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 129.

mean by a mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral care.

In this chapter we will begin to look at the mystical and biblical concepts that shape Heschel's understanding of the relationship between the divine and the human, first by considering key concepts from Kabbalah and, second, by considering the first two transcendental themes that he claims allude to the divine interest in humanity, namely, the ineffable and mystery, and the two corresponding human responses: wonder and awe.

Kabbalah: Jewish Mysticism

As we shift from Heschel's understanding of the human person to Heschel's view of transcendental themes and their corresponding human responses, first it will be helpful to explicate further specific concepts from Jewish mysticism introduced briefly above that are germane to forming and exercising a mystical-prophetic pastoral care. Doing so will illuminate more fully topics touched on previously, for example, Heschel's understanding of evil, polarity, and the human person, as well as set the stage for the development of such themes as sensing the divine presence, the dynamic interrelationship between God and humanity, divine pathos, and human sympathy.

The unity of Heschel's life and faith is rooted especially in his love and reverence for the Torah. His deep conviction is that "the presence of God is found in many ways, but above all God is found in the words of the Bible."⁴ Not merely in the words of the Bible, but more so by the responsiveness to the words in the Bible do humans experience the presence of God and the truths about life revealed in the Scriptures. Heschel's understanding of both humans and God are clearly shaped by the vision laid out in the Hebrew Scriptures.

⁴Patrick Granfield, Theologians At Work (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1967), 77.

Heschel's expertise in the Bible is matched by his comprehensive knowledge of rabbinic, kabbalistic, and Hasidic writings and oral traditions. In addition to being shaped and formed by Torah, Heschel's theology and theological anthropology are also a rich blend and dynamic synthesis of these teachings and texts. From an early age Heschel was exposed to and appropriated the texts of Kabbalah. Kabbalah, coming from the Hebrew word meaning *reception* or *tradition* (vb. "to receive"), is the esoteric and mystical expression of Judaism that focuses especially on the interpretation of the nature of God and the universe. From the Middle Ages to the present, as mentioned in Chapter One, there are two main forms of Kabbalah: the theoretical Kabbalah of the Middle Ages epitomized in the classic, Sefer ha-Zohar, and the Lurianic Kabbalah beginning in the 16th century with Isaac Luria.⁵ As a way of better understanding both the spiritual and theological milieu in which Heschel was nurtured and the less familiar mystical symbolization and religious perspectives that also shape his anthropology and theology, I will expound upon some key concepts from each of the above mentioned forms of Kabbalah. In particular, I will present the classical understanding of the ten *sefirot*, as they came to be described in the Sefer ha-Zohar, widely considered the crown jewel of

⁵ "Ancient Jewish mysticism includes two basic components: *ma'aseh merkaba*, 'the work of the chariot', which relates visionary experiences of God after the model of Ezekiel 1; and *ma'aseh bere'sit*, 'the work of creation', which focuses on understanding the principles of creation as articulated in Genesis 1:1-2:3." Sweeney, "Ten Sephirot," 838. The new configuration of Judaism that Kabbalah represents is the result of the inheritance and reinterpretation of the legacy that medieval Jews received from the Judaism of the Talmudic age, that is, from the sages of the second century C.E. up to and including the Geonic age (from the eighth to the tenth centuries). Five elements or traditions from this extended period, to greater or lesser degrees and in varying mixes, made their mark on Jewish mysticism in the Middle Ages and following: the narratives contained in the Talmud and the various works of Midrash (Midrashic-Aggadic Tradition); the legal and normative body of Talmudic teaching by which most kabbalists were educated and patterned their lives (Halakhic Tradition); the liturgical texts and poetry codified within *halakhah* that were prayed with *kavanah* and regarded as holy and mysterious (Liturgical Tradition); a form of visionary mystical praxis with roots in the Hellenistic era and in ancient Jewish apocalyptic literature (Merkavahic Tradition); and the few magic-theurgic texts represented by the Sefer Yetzirah, that spawned an essentially speculative and nonvisual mysticism (Speculative-Magical Tradition). Green, Guide to the Zohar, 9-14.

Jewish mystical texts. I will then offer a description and explanation of some key features of Lurianic Kabbalah.

The Ten Sefirot

Within the Jewish mystical tradition, the Sefer ha-Zohar (Zohar), is considered the most important and influential text. So revered was it that within a century of its publication it became known as the “third Bible” of the Jews, second in importance only to the Bible and the Talmud.⁶ This is so despite the fact that its readership was originally and primarily limited to the educated elite. As the central text of Kabbalah, it is “the great medieval Jewish compendium of mysticism, myth, and esoteric teaching” and represents “the highest expression of Jewish literary imagination in the Middle Ages.”⁷ Originally presented as a rediscovered ancient manuscript dating back to the second century C.E. and composed by the circle of those described in its pages, Rabbi Shim’on ben Yohai and his disciples, today scholars generally agree that it was actually compiled in the mid to late thirteenth century in Spain.⁸ The Zohar is not a unitary book that offers a single linear development of a particular type of mysticism. Like the Bible, the Zohar is rather a collection of texts, in this case dealing with Jewish esoteric and mystical teaching. Ordered in the form of a commentary on the Torah, it includes Midrashic commentary and homiletical explications of the biblical text, tales of the wanderings and adventures of

⁶David R. Blumenthal, Understanding Jewish Mysticism: A Source Reader, The Merkabah Tradition and The Zoharic Tradition (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1978), 101.

⁷Ibid., 3.

⁸See for example, Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1946, 1995), 156-204. Yehudah Fishel Lachower, Isaiah Tishby, and David Goldstein, comp. The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts, vol. 1 (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994), 89-94. Green, Guide to the Zohar, 4.

a band of disciples gathered around their master, mythical cosmogony, exegesis, as well as mystical psychology and anthropology. Although Rabbi Moses de Leon is considered the central figure in both the writings and the circulation of the Zohar, it presents different literary styles and offers “a panoply of mystical experiences.”⁹ Perhaps the most unifying factor in the Zohar is its attempt to explain the nature of God, as well as the nature and meaning of the cosmos and humankind as the intimately related extensions of the divine life.

Although an interpretation of the Torah, the Zohar consists of a uniquely mystical-esoteric exegesis. Kabbalah, in general, and the Zohar, in particular, as its authoritative text, represents a radical departure from any previously known version of Judaism, especially in the realm of theology.¹⁰ In particular, it is the Zohar’s depiction of God that stands not only in sharp contrast to previous Jewish conceptions but even more so to Greek philosophy which understands God as perfect, unchanging, and unsusceptible to the vagaries of human experience. More than a theological treatise, the Zohar is a work of theosophy in the sense that it purports not merely to report and interpret God’s revealed words and acts but also to describe (and therefore, to know) the inner workings of God’s consciousness and personality (as opposed to God’s essence).¹¹ In this sense, the Zohar is a work of spiritual theology and esoteric psychology. About this radical shift in understanding God, Zohar scholar, Isaiah Tishby states:

“The image of God portrayed in the descriptions of the kabbalists is absolutely different from that depicted anywhere else in Judaism. In place

⁹Two sections of the Zohar, the “Raya Mehemma” and the “Tikkunei-ha Zohar” bear the marks of another author’s hand. See Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 158-63; Lachower, Wisdom of the Zohar, 91-93; Green, Guide to the Zohar, 7.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹Blumenthal, Understanding Jewish Mysticism, 114.

of the strict Lawgiver and Ruler of the *halakhah*, or the merciful Father of the *aggadah*, or the awesome King of those who “descend to the chariot,” or the necessary Being and hidden Mover of the philosophers, all of whom are distinguished by both uniqueness and unity, we find in the kabbalah a divine image that is compound and complex, and that seems to be opposed and foreign to the Jewish spirit. It was not apparently a single God that was revealed to the kabbalists in their contemplation, but a number of different divine substances, arrayed in the order of the ten *sefirot*.¹²

Despite the fact that the word *sefirot* does not appear in the Torah, the most basic teaching of Kabbalah is the doctrine of the ten *sefirot*. It first appears in rabbinic Hebrew and refers to *counting, writing, or recording*.¹³ When the term “ten sefirot” appears in Sefer Yetzirah (Book of Creation), a third or fourth century C.E. cosmological and cosmogonic treatise, it refers to the ten primordial numbers or divine utterances by which the universe came into being.¹⁴ Eventually, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, for example, in the Sefer ha-Bahir (Book of Brilliance), and culminating in its development in the Sefer ha-Zohar (Book of Splendor) the term comes to represent “the ten emanations or abstract qualities of God by which the infinite God is known and manifested in the finite world.”¹⁵ The Sefer ha-Bahir uses the image of a tree growing upside down to convey the *sefirot*. The roots are in heaven and the uppermost branches (or “fullness” and “glory”) are in the earth. The roots and the branches are “all

¹²Lachower, Wisdom of the Zohar, 232-33.

¹³Sweeney, “Ten Sephirot,” 838.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 837.

¹⁵*Ibid.* Isaiah Tishby points out that emanation understood as the way in which motion begins at the source and continues from stage to stage is understood in the main body of the Zohar, as first, the actual process of formation of the *sefirot*, and second, as the descent of the divine influence by which the lower *sefirot* or worlds are sustained. A third sense of emanation, namely, the self-extension of the divine essence in the *sefirot* and the worlds, appears in two other sections of the Zoharic literature, the *Raya Mehemna* and the *Tikkunei ha-Zohar*. Consequently, there are a surplus of terms describing emanation which is used only in the later parts of the Zohar. Some examples of these different terms are: extension, dissemination, prolongation, expansion, flow, radiation, and illumination. The two most common images employed in the

intertwined and connected as the divine essence ‘flows’ through ‘channels’ from one sephirah to another.”¹⁶ Unlike the Sefer Yetzirah, which understands the *sefirot* as extradeical, the Zohar presents the *sefirot* as being inside of and a part of God, as “the basic components of the personality of God (and, by implication, of man).”¹⁷

The Zohar uses a variety of mixed metaphors, ancient images, and new and creative symbols to convey its understanding of the *sefirot* including lights, colors, levels, roots, garments, gardens, fountains, sexual union, impregnation, birth, and visual expressions of royalty, to name some but not all. Like the Sefer ha-Bahir, it also makes use of the upside down tree as well as the image of the primordial human being, *Adam Kadmon*. Each of the *sefirah* is identified with a certain part of the human anatomy which is, in turn, symbolic of an inner divine reality. Alluding to the multifacetedness within the oneness of God, the *sefirot* are variously conceived of in both temporal (stages) and spatial (rungs or spheres) images, even though they exist in neither time nor space. Rather they “represent an inner divine reality that is prior to these ways of dividing existence.”¹⁸ Together the ten *sefirot* effect the inner unity of God and “constitute the divine archetype of [the image of God], the mythical paragon of the human being, our original nature.”¹⁹

The *sefirot* are arranged in three triads, one atop the other, and in descending order represent the mental, moral, and material dimensions of the divine, the human, and

Zohar, as these terms suggest, are the shining and radiation of light, and the flowing of water from the source. Lachower, Wisdom of the Zohar, 273-74.

¹⁶Ibid., 839-40.

¹⁷Blumenthal, Understanding Jewish Mysticism, 114.

¹⁸Green, Guide to the Zohar, 35.

¹⁹Daniel Matt, trans. and comp., The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 8. See also Lachower, Wisdom of the Zohar, 295-99; Green, Guide to the Zohar, 36, 37.

the world.²⁰ These nine sefirot arranged in three interrelated triads are connected to the tenth and lowest *sefirah* which, as we will see, is the presence of the divine in the world, “not a source of its own but the outflow of the other *Sefirot*.”²¹ Each triad is comprised of two opposite characteristics in dynamic tension that are balanced by a third mediating reality. Divine, human, and cosmic harmony depends upon the balance and equilibrium between these contrasting forces in each triad. As we will see, the presence of evil, especially, depends on whether or not and to what degree two poles in particular, *Hesed* (the Grace or love of God) and *Gevurah* (Strength), sometimes called *Din*, (the Judgment of God), are brought into an intricately delicate balance.²² In addition to being viewed as three triads, the *sefirot* are also perceived as three columns divided into a *right* column, signifying Mercy, or light; a *left* column, signifying Severity, the absence of light; and a *central* column, signifying the synthesis of the right and the left.²³ These “columns” are meant to suggest the process of emanations as a chain of events that run along three parallel but interactive lines: on the right, the line of Love; on the left, the line of Judgment; and in the middle the line of Mercy.²⁴ Although this concept does not appear in crystallized form in the *Zohar*, it is implied and later becomes of great importance in kabbalistic doctrine.²⁵

The sefirotic system, perhaps the most original and distinguishing element within

²⁰These are also referred to as the divine, spiritual, and physical spheres. See, for example, Heschel, “The Mystical Element,” 170.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Sweeney, “Ten Sephirot,” 841.

²³*Ibid.*, 171.

²⁴Lachower, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 278.

²⁵*Ibid.*

all Jewish mysticism, begins with the *Ein Sof*.²⁶ Although the kabbalists portray the inner workings of God, they do not portend to know the *essence* of God. Rather they “assure us that all notions fail when applied to Him, that He is beyond the grasp of the human mind and inaccessible to meditation.”²⁷ It is perhaps for this reason that, like all mystics, the kabbalist’s rely on an imaginative plethora of metaphors and symbols when dealing with “the mystery of all mysteries.” *Ein Sof* denotes “the hidden God, the innermost being of God” that is without qualities or attributes. Scholar, Arthur Green, Professor of Jewish Thought at Brandeis University states, “*Ein Sof* refers to the endless and undefinable reservoir of divinity, the ultimate source out of which everything flows.”²⁸ *Ein Sof* designates “the Endless” or “the Infinite” or “that which is beyond all limits.” Daniel Matt, professor of Jewish mysticism at the Center for Jewish Studies in Berkeley, California, states, “In contrast to the personal God of the sefirot, Ein Sof represents the radical transcendence of God. Not much more can be said.”²⁹ He notes that in addition to understanding God as the *Ein Sof*, Jewish mystics adopted Maimonides’ negative theology which emphasized that “the descriptions of God by means of negation is the correct description.”³⁰ Consequently, the *Ein Sof* is at times also referred to as *Ayin*,

²⁶The word *system* is only appropriate if we understand it in dynamic terms, realizing that the *sefirot* are not only interconnected, interacting and interdependent but energized and moving. As such they comprise a collective entity. Arthur Green describes the *sefirot* as a complex network of associated symbols. He explains, “the *sefirot* may be viewed not as hypostatic “entities” but as *symbol clusters*, linked by association, the mention or textual occurrence of any of which automatically brings to mind all the others as well.” Green, Guide to the Zohar, 56.

²⁷Heschel, “Mystical Element in Judaism,” in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 169.

²⁸Green, Guide to the Zohar, 34.

²⁹Matt, Essential Kabbalah, 7.

³⁰Moses Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed, tr. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 58-59, quoted in Daniel Matt, The Essential Kabbalah, 8.

meaning “Nothing.” This dimension of kabbalistic thought resembles the *via negativa* or apophatic way spoken of and practiced by certain Christian mystics.

Kabbalah authority, Gershom Scholem, explains that the Zohar distinguishes between two realities or worlds, which both represent God. The primary world is infinite, hidden, and utterly unknowable to all except God. This is the realm of *Ein Sof*. The second reality, is “the world of attributes,” necessarily and dynamically joined to and emanating from the first (*Ein Sof*), making it possible to know aspects of the Divine Self. Again, what is susceptible to knowledge and perception is not God’s essence but only the portion of the mystery that concerns the self-revealing God.³¹ Heschel explains:

The ways in which the Infinite assumes the form of finite existence are called the *Sefirot*. These are various aspects or forms of divine action, spheres of divine emanation. They are, as it were, the garments in which the Hidden God reveals Himself and acts in the universe, the channels through which His light is issued forth.³²

Although virtually nothing can be known or said about God as *Ein-Sof*, the emanative realm of the *sefirot* is accessible to human contemplation and description.³³ Tishby refers to the *sefirot* as ten stages in the revelation of *Ein Sof*, which clothes itself in them.³⁴ He and others emphasize that despite the use of words like “levels” and “stages” to describe them, the *sefirot* are not considered by most kabbalists and the main author of the Zohar as spiritual intermediary stages between God and humans, but rather

³¹Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 233.

³²Heschel, “Mystical Element in Judaism,” 169-70.

³³Lawrence Fine, trans., Safed Spirituality: Rules of Mystical Piety, The Beginning of Wisdom (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 6.

³⁴Lachower, Wisdom of the Zohar, 260. See note 22.

are “parts of the divine being, if one can say such a thing.”³⁵ The Zohar, borrowing from the Sefer Yetzirah, compares the relationship between *Ein Sof* and the *sefirot* to a burning coal and its flame, the flame being a manifestation of what is concealed in the coal.³⁶ The *sefirot* both conceal and reveal the *Ein Sof*, but ultimately there is no duality between the hidden and revealed God.³⁷ It is important to note that the *sefirot* clothe, and therefore, conceal the essence of the *Ein Sof*, thus “protecting” the lower regions who would otherwise not be able to apprehend it. Furthermore, it is crucial to realize that the *sefirot* do not merely flow unidirectionally but rather “the divine life pulsates back and forth” between the divine realm and the lower worlds, and finally between the holy and the human. The *sefirot*, then, are manifestations of the hidden life of God which both establish the lower, nondivine worlds, including its very lowest manifestation in the material world, and are the self-revelation and action of God in those worlds.³⁸ About the kabbalistic concept of “worlds” (plural) which become more prominent in Luria’s system, Heschel states:

In the process of emanation, the transition from the divine to the spiritual, from the spiritual to the moral, from the moral to the physical, reality takes place. The product of this manifestation is not only the visible universe but an endless number of spiritual worlds which exist beyond the physical universe in which we live.³⁹

³⁵Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 209. See also, for example, Lachower, Wisdom of the Zohar, 233.

³⁶Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 208.

³⁷Lachower, Wisdom of the Zohar, 249.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 233.

³⁹Heschel, “Mystical Element in Judaism,” 170. In light of this reference to other “spiritual worlds”, Scholem’s description mentioned above of “two worlds,” the realm of *Ein Sof* and the sefirotic world of attributes, must be clarified. These two “worlds” are, in a sense, one and the same intradivine life. Sometimes, in kabbalah, “upper world” refers to the sefirotic realm as a whole as opposed to the “lower world” which signifies the concrete physical world of human action. About the time the Zohar was being composed, other kabbalists began to describe a four-tiered universe with successive “worlds” being called,

In addition to understanding the movement of the *sefirot* into other worlds, Heschel explains also that “each *sefirah* is a world in itself, dynamic and full of complicated mutual relations with the other *Sefirot*.”⁴⁰ From top to bottom, in order of appearance,⁴¹ the *sefirot* are: *Keter*, *Hokhmah*, *Binah*, *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, *Netsah*, *Hod*, *Yesod*, and *Malkhut*. The first *sefirah*, *Keter*, meaning “Crown” (also called *Razon*, i.e., Will), is essentially without content. It is “the primeval divine Will,” although at this stage it is in essence pure or general and, therefore, not directed toward any specific object outside itself. It is because it is pure Will, pure potential, and understood as bearing all content while actually bearing none, that the rather vague realm of this first *sefirah*, like *Ein Sof* to which it is the nearest, is sometimes referred to as *Ayin*, “Nothing.” For this reason many of the terms used to describe it are apophatic, describing it negatively. Examples are “the air that cannot be grasped,” or “the hidden light.”⁴²

Another image assigned to this *sefirah* is that of the crown. Whereas the pictorial image of the crown does nothing to define or convey the essential nature of the first *sefirah*, it does point to its eminence in relationship to both *Ein Sof* (*Keter Elyon* means “the

atsilut, *beriah*, *yetsirah*, and *asiyyah*, that is, the worlds of Emanation, Creation, Formation, and Actualization. These are the worlds Heschel has in mind. In descending order these worlds stand for the inner divine realm, the world of visionary experience, the world of angels, and the world of souls. Each of these four worlds is arranged according to the same ten-fold sefirotic structure. The material world of human life is beneath the fourth world, *asiyyah*, Actualization or Fashioning, but is dominated by its spirit. The visible creation and process of the physical world where humans live corresponds to and parallels the concealed, dynamic structure of the above worlds. “Not only does everything in the material world *mirror* a spiritual reality above, but everything in creation is *invested* with divine vitality or abundance from the Sefirot.” Fine, *Safed Spirituality*, 7. See also, for example, Green *Guide to the Zohar*, 110ff.

⁴⁰Ibid., 171.

⁴¹Under the influence of the Neoplatonists, the kabbalists came to describe the *sefirot* as emerging in sequence, but remember that this sequence does not have to be one of time. Green clarifies, “the sequence is rather one of an intrinsic logic, each stage a response to that which comes “before” it. Green, *Guide to Zohar*, 42.

⁴²Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 38.

Supreme Crown of God”) and the other *sefirot* (where it is portrayed as the “crown of crowns”).⁴³ About the first *sefirah* Green reiterates, it “represents the primal stirrings of intent within *Ein Sof*, the arousal of desire to come forth into the varied life of being.”⁴⁴

From *Keter* emerges *Hokhmah* (Wisdom), the first and finest “point” of substantive being. Within this primal point, “at once infinitesimally small and great beyond measure,” all things that will ever come to be exist. The move from the first *sefirah* to the second is the first step in the “transition from nothingness to being, from pure potential to the first point of real existence.”⁴⁵ If *Keter* is Divine Will, then *Hokhmah* is Divine Thought, although as of yet still unexpressed and inapprehensible. Thus, as *Hokhmah* emerges, it brings forth its own mate, called *Binah* (Understanding or Contemplation). Because these first two *sefirot* are so intimately and interdependently connected, they are often considered by kabbalists as the primal Father and Mother, symbolizing “the deepest polarities of male and female within the divine (and human) self.”⁴⁶ Together, these three *sefirot* symbolize the head of *Adam Kadmon*. As Divine Thought, *Hokhmah*, also called the ‘Beginning,’ creates the plan for the conception of all being, while *Binah*, as the Divine Mother, gives birth to the seven “lower” *sefirot* making the flash of intellect that seeks articulation an earthly reality.⁴⁷ These seven *sefirot* constitute seven aspects of the divine *persona*. They are often depicted as seven directions that encircle a center (*Tiferet*) or the seven days of the week culminating in the

⁴³Lachower, Wisdom of the Zohar, 269.

⁴⁴Green, Guide to Zohar, 38.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁷Sweeney, “Ten Sephirot,” 841. See also, Green, Guide to the Zohar, 41.

Sabbath or as seven children born from the womb of *Binah*.⁴⁸ Green explains:

Together these constitute the God who is the object of worship and the One whose image is reflected in each human soul. The divine Self, as conceived by Kabbalah, is an interplay of these seven forces or inner directions. So too is each human personality—God's image in the world.⁴⁹

Unlike the first triad of *sefirot*, which is the most primal and obscure level of the inner divine world, the other two triads are explicit dialectical structures with sets of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and a final *sefirot* that functions as a vehicle of reception and energizes the entire system from below in a corresponding way to *Keter* from above.⁵⁰

The first *sefirot* of the second triad (the moral or spiritual sphere) is *Hesed* (signifying the Grace or Love of God). Green writes:

The emergence of God from hiding is an act filled with love, a promise of all the endless showering of blessing and life on all beings, each of whose birth in a sense will continue this process of emerging from the One. This gift of love is beyond measure and without limit; the boundless compassion of *Keter* is now transposed into a love for each specific form and creature that is ever to emerge. This channel of grace is the original divine *shefa*, the bounteous and unlimited love of God.⁵¹

But the divine understands that love alone is not a sufficient or wise way to bring forth other beings and allow them their place. *Hesed* emerges not alone but linked to its opposite, described as both *Gevurah* (the bastion of Divine Power), and as *Din* (the Judgment of God). Whereas *Hesed* is identified with the right arm of *Adam Kadmon*, *Gevurah* is identified as the left. Integral to the history of Jewish thought and practice is

⁴⁸Lachower, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 282. Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 42.

⁴⁹Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 42.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 42-43.

the idea of maintaining a proper balance between love and law. They see this not only as the struggle of the rabbis who are leading and guiding the people, not only as the tension in the actual lives of the people trying to live holy lives, but also as existing in God as well. Green describes these two *sefirot*. He states:

Hesed represents the God of love, calling forth the response of love in the human soul as well. *Hesed* in the mystic's soul is the love of God and of all of God's creatures, the ability to continue this divine flow, passing on to others the gift of divine love. *Gevurah* represents the God we humans fear, the One before whose power we stand in trembling.⁵²

As briefly mentioned above, it is here, in the delicate and crucial relationship between *Hesed* and *Gevurah*, in both the divine and the human self, that kabbalists see danger lurking. This relationship, they believe, if not effectively negotiated, is the birthplace of evil.⁵³ Green describes what happens when *Gevurah* dominates. He states:

Gevurah becomes impatient with *Hesed*, unwilling to see judgment set aside in the name of love. Rather than permitting love to flow in measured ways, *Gevurah* seeks some cosmic moment in which to rule alone, to hold back the flow of love. In this "moment" divine power turns to rage or fury; out of it all forces of evil are born, darkness emerging from the light of God, a shadow of the divine universe that continues to exist throughout history, sustained by the evil wrought by humans below.⁵⁴

One of the essential moral teachings of Kabbalah stresses that, if *Gevurah*, or *Din*, as the Judgment or "left" side of God, goes untempered by love, it brings about evil. "Power obsessed with itself turns demonic."⁵⁵ This demonic or evil force is often referred to in the *Zohar* as *sitra ahra*, the "Other Side," and indicates an emanation that parallels and

⁵²Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 43.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 44. Green points out that this is one of several myths regarding the origin of evil as presented in the *Zohar*.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

mocks the divine. However, the origin of this evil emanation that is parallel to the *sefirot* is not some “distant” force. Rather “the demonic is born of an imbalance within the divine, flowing ultimately from the same source as all else, the single source of being.”⁵⁶

Within the Zohar itself there are differing ways of accounting for the origin and existence of evil. For most kabbalists, evil is not simply a pressing problem to be dealt with and managed by a neat and tidy philosophical formula, but rather an actual reality of life, present in both cosmos and soul, with which they are unavoidably engaged and thus forced to do battle. The prevalent Zoharic view is that the Other Side originates within divinity, but this understanding does not negate the strong sense within Judaism of “human responsibility in the creation of evil.”⁵⁷ Although the wicked forces in the universe are intent on tempting humans and leading them down the path of transgression, Green points out:

[T]hese forces themselves are sustained and nourished by human evil. The more apologetic kabbalists insist that only the *potential* for evil exists within God (as does all potential), and that the negative forces emerging from the left side have no power until humans, beginning with the sin of Adam, turn their own energies in the direction of evil.⁵⁸

Whatever the explanation, evil is the disharmony that arises within the emanations so that God’s quality of judgment becomes separated from God’s quality of mercy. In the sefirotic system, evil and human sin are the result of succumbing to the temptation of the imbalance of the same inner forces that exist within the divine cosmic structure in whose image each and all human beings are created. Just as the consecrated deed can unify the

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 45.

⁵⁸Ibid.

sefirot and bring blessing upon the world and the divine, so too, the surrender to the Other Side's persuasion can arouse evil in the cosmos and the divine, separating the "right" and the "left", effecting a perilous imbalance. Even though the divine, the world, and the human person all require the proper appropriation of *Gevurah*, the kabbalistic ethos encourages that in all three realms the forces of love and compassion must be given at least a slight advantage. When each of the three lean to the "right" or *Hesed* side, love remains sufficiently strong and free to flow.⁵⁹

The need for the delicate balance between *Hesed* and *Gevurah*, between graceful love and stern judgment, results in the sixth *sefirah*, *Tiferet*, which is the center of the sefirotic universe. It is identified with the torso of *Adam Kadmon*. Also called *Rahamim*, that is, Compassion or Mercy, *Tiferet*, meaning Beauty, is pictured as the son of *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, the harmonizer of *Hesed* and *Gevurah*, and is positioned directly beneath *Keter*, the divine that precedes all duality. This sixth *sefirah*, also called the "blessed Holy One," represents the personal God of the biblical and rabbinic literature and serves as a model of idealized human personality. This is the God Israel is called to imitate, the Holy One successfully harmonizing the inner divine struggle whom God's people are encouraged to emulate by integrating the contrasting personal and cosmic forces.⁶⁰ Tishby points out that the three *sefirot* of the second triad, *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet*, are the light, darkness, and the firmament of the first chapter of Genesis. He writes:

The light and the darkness stand for the contrast between love and judgment, while the firmament, which is the area where light and darkness

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 45, 46.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 46. Matt, Essential Kabbalah, 8.

meet and interchange in the hours of twilight, represents the way in which these opposing powers are tempered and mixed together in mercy.⁶¹

The central triad of *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet* is followed by another triad that is the source of the psychic and physical existences.⁶² The seventh, eighth, and ninth *sefirot*, *Netsah*, *Hod*, and *Yesod* respectively, are arranged similarly to the previous triangle and act as branches, offshoots, or channels of the above energies. *Netsah* (Endurance) constitutes the male principle of physical reality and represents the right leg of *Adam Kadmon* while *Hod* (Splendor) signifies the female principle and is pictured as the left leg of the primordial human. Whereas *Netsah* expresses the dynamism or change of the material world, *Hod* expresses constancy. Kabbalistic texts identify these as the sources of prophecy. *Yesod*, meaning Foundation, harmonizes the two opposite forces in the triad and is the single place where all the above divine potencies unite. Here, the divine energies, often imaged as radiating light or flowing water, are commonly described as male sexual energy, as semen. *Yesod* represents the phallus of *Adam Kadmon* and is the procreative force in the world.⁶³

Just as *Hokhmah* began the flow of these energies in a single point, so now *Yesod* prepares to direct their flow once again, in this case on their way to the tenth *sefirah*, *Malkhut* (Kingdom), the world of formation and actualization. Also called *Shekinah* (the Presence of God), the tenth *sefirah* is the point at which the manifestations of the *Ein Sof* come in contact with the external world through knowledge and practice.⁶⁴ “The sefirotic

⁶¹Lachower, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 282.

⁶²Heschel, “Mystical Element in Judaism,” 170.

⁶³Sweeney, “Ten Sephirot,” 841. Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 48, 49.

⁶⁴Sweeney, “Ten Sephirot,” 842.

process thus leads to the great union of the nine *sefirot* above, through *Yesod*, with the female *Shekinah*.⁶⁵ She is considered the “gateway” through which humans have access to the mysteries beyond. In Kabbalah, *Shekinah* becomes explicitly feminine: daughter of *Binah*, bride of *Tiferet*, and represents the feminine dimension of God.⁶⁶ *Shekinah* is impregnated with the fullness of divine energy and becomes the source of all life for the lower worlds.

The doctrine of the *Shekinah* not only is central to kabbalah and to the *Zohar*, but has a long, deep tradition within Judaism and, according to Heschel, is essential for understanding the pathos of God (which will be discussed at length in Chapter Six). In ancient rabbinic Midrash, the *Shekinah* appears as the immanence of God that is described as dwelling in Israel’s midst. In the midrashic tradition, in particular, the *Shekinah* is presented as compassionate presence, as identifying with the sufferings of Israel. It also is portrayed as accompanying, first, Adam, and later, Israel, into exile. Over time, partly because of medieval philosophy’s unease with assigning anthropomorphisms to the divine, a distinction began to appear between God and the *Shekinah*. Consequently, in the medieval Jewish imagination the *Shekinah* often appears as a winged divine being protectively hovering over the community of Israel. At times “the community of Israel” itself becomes identified with *Shekinah* or *Malkhut* as an extension of the belief that the *Shekinah* only dwells on earth *because* Israel observes the Torah.⁶⁷ This latter idea is kin to the promise found in the *Zohar* that redemption will come if even just one Jewish

⁶⁵Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 49.

⁶⁶Matt, *Essential Kabbalah*, 9.

⁶⁷Heschel, “Mystical Element in Judaism,” 172.

community achieves complete repentance.

Heschel summarizes the meaning, power, and import of the doctrine of the *Shekinah* not only for ancient rabbinic and kabbalistic thought but also for contemporary Jewish life. He states:

The *Shekinah* is called figuratively the *Matrona* (symbolized by the ineffable name *Elohim*) that is separated from the King (symbolized by the ineffable name *Hashem*), and it signifies that God is, so to speak, involved in the tragic state of this world. In the light of this doctrine the suffering of Israel assumed new meaning. Not only Israel but the whole universe, even the *Shekinah*, "lies in dust" and is in exile. Man's task is to bring about the restitution of the original state of the universe and the reunion of the *Shekinah* and the *En Sof*. This is the meaning of messianic salvation, the goal of all efforts.⁶⁸

Because of the experiences of historical exile, both the pre-Zoharic idea of the *Shekinah* being in exile and the later kabbalistic depiction of the *Shekinah* having been cut off from her source of nourishment become significant images for the Jewish community. In Lurianic kabbalah, even more than in the *Zohar*, this idea is specifically understood as a reflection of the inner experience of the divine. The external realities of history are considered to have their parallel in the life of God thus offering both an explanation for and comfort in those difficult circumstances.

Thus, from a kabbalistic viewpoint, and in light of the *Shekinah*, and mixing metaphors in Zoharic fashion, we can state the goal of the religious life in a number of ways: it is to stimulate *Yesod* by contemplative devotional practice and righteous actions, thus helping to unite the "blessed Holy One," *Tiferet*, and *Shekinah* in a cosmic wedding; it is to rouse the *Shekinah* into a state of love; it is to oppose evil and to repair the universe through pious actions and cleaving to God (*Devekut*) thus restoring within God

⁶⁸Ibid.

and the cosmos the original harmony between the quality of judgment (*Din*) and the quality of mercy (*Hesed*); it is to reunite the upper nine *sefirot* with the tenth and bottommost *sefirah* that were separated by Adam's sin, thus disrupting the original harmony and thwarting the emanation and flow of God's power; and it is to bring the *Shekinah* home from exile and to reunite Her with the *Ein Sof* by good deeds and longing for God.⁶⁹ In Lurianic kabbalah, as we will see, this harmonizing of the feminine and the masculine, severe judgment and merciful love, is transposed into the doctrine of *tikkun*.

Furthering the ideas above, Arthur Green emphasizes the kabbalistic view of the resemblance and intimate connection between the human and the divine and the consequential implications, namely, the human potential and power, positively or negatively, to impact the human soul, the cosmos, and the divine. He writes:

The soul *partakes* of the divine structure in a real way. It is not just a copy of the *sefirot*, but actually represents their presence within the self. Because of this, the actions of the person, including both the sanctification and the defilement of the soul, make their mark above. The interrelationship between God and person is quite mutual; the parts of the soul both show their divine origins and allow for the possibility of human action on the cosmic plane.⁷⁰

Indeed, "this doctrine of the repercussions of religious deeds constitutes one of the most far-reaching conceptions of Kabbalah" and is clearly woven into the fabric of Heschel's twentieth century theological vision and personal piety.

In summary, one of the greatest contributions in all of the kabbalistic literature is the original and important Zoharic and sefirotic understanding of God. Here the life and being of God is not imagined as static and fixed but as interactive, dynamic, and

⁶⁹Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 53, 106. Heschel, "Mystical Element in Judaism," in S. Heschel, ed., *Moral Grandeur*, 171, 172.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 114.

energized; not as impersonal but as personal; not as distant and disconnected but as drawing near and passionately engaged. The various images, especially of light and water, but also of semen and sap, aim to emphasize this dynamic flow of divine energy. In Understanding Jewish Mysticism, David Blumenthal writes, “An energy pervades this system, and this energy flows from sefira to sefira, activating and intensifying its characteristics as it moves.”⁷¹ Moreover, it is important to realize that the images of flow, potency, oppositional tension, and movement of the *sefirot* serve not only to illuminate the intra-divine life, but also to indicate the dynamism and mutuality operative between the divine and the human. “In this drama every single individual [has] a role to play and no action [is] devoid of redemptive significance.”⁷² This central kabbalistic conviction developed further in Lurianic kabbalah finds its way into Hasidic piety and practice where an emphasis is put on the human responsibility and privilege to aid God in the redemption of the world. The sefirotic flow that emanates from the *Ein Sof* down through the ten *sefirot* into and through the lower worlds and finally into the material universe sets in motion a passionate, two-way, divine-human exchange. Divine, cosmic, and human becoming are interrelated and interactively dependent and supportive.

Three Symbols from Lurianic Kabbalah

Isaac Luria is generally considered one of the most important and influential religious figures that Judaism has every produced.⁷³ In his tribute to Eastern European

⁷¹Blumenthal, Understanding Jewish Mysticism, 115.

⁷²Fine, Safed Spirituality, 9.

⁷³See for example, Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 22, 251-56; Fine, Safed Spirituality, 61; Joseph Dan, Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 92. Lawrence Fine, Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1.

Jews, The Earth Is the Lord's, Heschel mentions that in the seventeenth century the mystic teachings of the Zohar and of Rabbi Isaac Luria began to penetrate into Poland and to influence the pattern of life. Two centuries later, Heschel, a young Hasid living in Poland, intimately experienced the profound impact of Luria's ideas on an entire community and culture.

Born in Jerusalem, Isaac Luria was raised in Egypt where his mother brought him to live with an uncle after his father died when Isaac was still young. He studied with two prominent rabbis and then, according to some accounts, lived in seclusion on an island on the Nile where reportedly he immersed himself in the Zohar and other kabbalistic texts. In late 1569 or early 1570, at age thirty-six, Luria moved to Safed, in Upper Galilee, where he became a disciple of Moses Cordovero, one of the greatest theoreticians of Jewish mysticism of all time. Safed had become the center for the new kabbalistic movement forty years or so after the eviction of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Cordovero died in the fall of 1570, shortly after Luria's arrival. Soon Luria had gathered an elite circle of his own disciples with whom he studied rabbinic and kabbalistic texts and to whom he began teaching his unique and imaginative ideas. Like Cordovero, Luria died young, succumbing to an epidemic in the summer of 1572 at the age of thirty-eight. Among his most famous students were Hayyim Vital and Joseph Ibn Tabul who were largely responsible for recording, preserving, and eventually spreading Luria's ideas to a wider audience. Thus, what we know today of Luria's mystical teaching is based on the presentation, interpretation, and reworking of his ideas by his disciples. Although Luria considered his ideas esoteric and meant only for a select group, and despite the fact that he committed to writing virtually nothing of his mystical thinking, by the middle of the

seventeenth century elements of Luria's theology and a number of his ritual innovations had spread throughout much of the Jewish world and become largely the basis for Jewish mysticism and for Jewish ethics as well.⁷⁴

Although a charismatic, visionary, and saintly character who, according to his disciples, possessed unusual "supernatural" abilities, Luria's lasting greatness and the greatness of his system resided more in his ability to provide direct and creative responses to the most basic and existential problems that concern religion and philosophy as well as to construct a theological vision that offered an anagogical view of historical realities, past and present, but especially the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Joseph Dan, the Gershom Scholem Professor of Kabbalah at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem submits:

Luria put in the heart of his mysticism the problems in the creation of the world and the creation of man, to which he gave the clearest answers to be found in Jewish mystical literature. He dealt with the problem that most troubled his generation: that of the reason for the exile of the people Israel, a problem which the tragic results of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain made all the more acute. His treatment of the question of the origins and meaning of the existence of evil is the most penetrating in Jewish thought. And he succeeded in translating his answers into a practical religious and ethical system which every Jew, even if completely ignorant of Lurianic symbolism, could follow and fulfill.⁷⁵

Even more than the Zohar, Luria's new myth addressed the issue and experience of exile. Especially for those Jews for whom life was conceived as "Existence in Exile,"⁷⁶ Luria's cosmogony provided both spiritual solace and mythological rationale.

Although it is beyond the scope of this project to present Luria's theory in all its

⁷⁴Fine, Safed Spirituality, 61-62. Matt, Essential Kabbalah, 14-15. Dan, Jewish Mysticism, 92. Heschel, The Earth is the Lord's, 9, 69.

⁷⁵Dan, Jewish Mysticism, 93.

⁷⁶Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 249.

intricate detail or to trace its conceptual development, my intent is to explain the basic features of his cosmological myth as clearly as possible and in a way that helps us both to fill out Heschel's work and vision and to imagine the pastoral implications that are elicited by the myth's most important symbols.

Luria's fundamental myth, which is simultaneously a theogony (an explanation of the self-manifestation of the divine) and a cosmogony (an explanation of the manifestation of the universe), revolves around three key symbols: the *tzimtzum*, or self-limitation of God, the *shevirah ha kelim*, or the breaking of the vessels, and the *tikkun*, or the harmonious repair and mending of the universe which came into the world through the *shevirah*.⁷⁷ Each of the three powerful symbols signifies not only something that occurs in the cosmic realm but in the divine realm as well.

Luria's theory begins with the rudimentary question,

How can there be a world if God is everywhere? If God is 'all in all,' how can there be things which are not God? How can God create the world out of nothing if there is no nothing?⁷⁸

The inventive myth Luria formulated as his answer bears no resemblance to the brevity, elegant simplicity, and linear narrative of the biblical accounts of creation. Nor is it like the straightforward cosmogony put forth in the *Zohar* and by the older kabbalists who had a rather simple conception of the cosmological process. Luria's cosmogony is creative, elaborate (if at times crude), and marked by dramatic intensity. Yet, as ingenious and inspired as it is, Luria's theory is not altogether original.⁷⁹ He developed

⁷⁷Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 126.

⁷⁸Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 260-61.

⁷⁹See Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 129.

his system from the ideas of his teacher, Moses Cordovero, and the old Spanish kabbalists. Part of his visionary genius resided in his ability to unearth inconspicuous passages from forgotten texts, breathe new life into them through unique reinterpretations, and develop an imaginative but historically relevant system for the kabbalistic movement of his day. Scholem traces the origin of Luria's theory and the notion of *tzimtzum* to an idea buried in a seemingly incidental passage in a forgotten mid-thirteenth century text that the visionary made use of and, curiously but not surprisingly, to the inversion of a Talmudic passage which Luria stood on its head, "no doubt believing he had put it on its feet."⁸⁰ Scholem explains:

The Midrash—in sayings originating from third century teachers—occasionally refers to God as having concentrated His Shekhinah, His divine presence, in the holiest of holies, at the place of the *Cherubim*, as though His whole power were concentrated and contracted in a single point. Here we have the origin of the term *Tsimtsum*, while the thing itself is the precise opposite of this idea: to the Kabbalist of Luria's school *Tsimtsum* does not mean the concentration of God *at* a point, but his retreat *away* from a point.⁸¹

Luria extrapolates liberally from this and other obscure kabbalistic texts and from the Zohar, by positing an earlier stage than is described in the depiction of creation in the Zohar. In other words, Luria's theory of *tzimtzum* presents a prelude to the emanative realm of the *sefirot* as understood in the traditional kabbalistic system, especially as put forth in the Zohar. As we shall see, he uses but revises this classical view of creation. In the description and understanding of creation in the Bible or the Zohar, creation is viewed as a positive and proactive event, and in the case of the Zohar which borrows from Neoplatonism, is expressly emanational in character. In Luria's cosmogony, although the

⁸⁰Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 260.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

intention is positive, the original act of creation is not a movement outward as is typically assumed by most monotheists but rather a movement inward. Specifically, the first divine action is one of withdrawal. Known in Hebrew as *tzimtzum* (literally “contraction” or “shrinkage”), this original event is actually understood by kabbalists as a retreat or movement inward that occurs within God by God. Scholem explains, according to Luria,

God was compelled to make room for the world by, as it were, abandoning a region within Himself, a kind of mystical primordial space from which He withdrew in order to return to it in the act of creation and revelation. The first act of *Ein Sof*, the Infinite Being, is therefore not a step outside but a step inside, a movement of recoil, of falling back upon oneself, of withdrawing into oneself. Instead of emanation we have the opposite, contraction.⁸²

Luria conceives of the cosmos in its primordial condition as filled entirely with the presence of God, which he imagines as limitless divine light. In this context, *tzimtzum* is the withdrawal of the Godhead from itself and away from a certain point or space which was then emptied and, as a result, made available for other nondivine reality. This vacant space is called *tehiru*, meaning “empty” in Aramaic.⁸³ Thus, in contrast to biblical and earlier kabbalistic texts, including the *Zohar*, “The first act of all is not an act of revelation but one of limitation.”⁸⁴

As do others, Scholem considers Luria’s theory of *tsimtsum* “one of the most amazing and far-reaching conceptions ever put forward in the whole history of Kabbalism.”⁸⁵ Understood as the starting point of his innovative cosmogony, an expansive and coherent system that includes the other two evocative symbols noted

⁸²*Ibid.*, 261.

⁸³Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 126. Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, 94. This primordial space is also referred to as the *pleroma*.

⁸⁴Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 261.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 260.

above, *shevirat ha kelim* (the breaking of the vessels) and *tikkun* (mending), *tzimtzum* postulates divine exile (*galut ha shekinah*) as the beginning of all existence.”⁸⁶ Joseph Dan explains,

Exile is no longer a human term, relating to the fate of the Jewish people; it is a mysterious process within the Godhead, which began long before the creation of man or of the people of Israel.⁸⁷

In this view, *tsimtsum* is the original and ultimate act of divine exile in which the Godhead willingly withdraws from a space in order to make the initiation of creation possible.⁸⁸

No doubt Heschel has not only the sefirotic system but also Luria’s doctrine of *tsimtsum* in mind when he says things like, “Just as the soul fills the body, so God fills the world. Just as the soul carries the body so God carries the world,”⁸⁹ or “All existence stands in the dimension of the holy and nothing can be conceived of as living outside of it,”⁹⁰ or “From the beginning of creation the Holy One, blessed be He, longed to enter into partnership with the terrestrial world.”⁹¹ More directly, he states:

Being is both presence and absence. God had to conceal His presence in order to bring the world into being. He had to make absence possible in order to make room for the world’s presence. Coming into being brought along denial and defiance, absence, oblivion, and resistance.⁹²

⁸⁶Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, 94.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*

⁸⁸*Ibid.* Gershom Scholem believes that when *tzimtzum* is thought of in this way, that is, as the “withdrawal of God into his own Being in terms of Exile, of banishing Himself from His totality into profound seclusion,” that this is “the deepest symbol of Exile” there is, even deeper than “the Breaking of the Vessels.” Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 261.

⁸⁹Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 122.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 237.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 123.

⁹²Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 90.

It is not surprising that the kabbalistic sources give more than one reason for the *tzimtzum*. One account, favored by Vital, suggests divine benevolence as the primary motivator. God wishes to benefit something other than divinity and so conceives of the idea of creating other “worlds” by establishing room in which this can take place. Here *tzimtzum* is portrayed as a free act of divine love. According to other accounts, *tzimtzum* is a sort of divine self-cleansing by which “divinity sought to cleanse itself of the power of stern judgment.” In this view, prior to *tzimtzum*, the essence of the Divine Being is a mixture of good and the roots of evil. Divinity contains not only qualities of Love and Mercy, but also of Sternness which was previously hidden like salt in water. The process of *tzimtzum*, Fine explains,

constituted a cathartic gesture in which *Ein-Sof* purified itself by gathering together and thereby expunging the elements of *Din* within it. This entailed a process of disentanglement insofar as good and “the roots of Judgment” had been thoroughly intertwined. *Ein-Sof*, then, collected all the roots of *Din* in one place so as to leave them behind within the primeval space created through *tsimtsum*.⁹³

But the roots of *Din* are not the only elements left behind in the empty space since residue of the light of Compassion (*Hesed* and *Rahamim*) known as *reshimu* are left behind as well. These traces of divine light are often compared to the small amount of water left in a bucket or oil left in a vessel after its contents have been poured out.⁹⁴ The amount of *reshimu* in the empty space, however, is minimal compared to the quantity of *Din*, reversing the proportions between *Rahamim* and *Din* that existed prior to *tzimtzum*. According to one account given by Vital, the powers of stern Judgment that previously

⁹³Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 130.

⁹⁴See Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 130, 131. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 263. Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism*, 162, 163. Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, 95.

existed in the Divine Being as undifferentiated now gather in the empty space and become “transformed into an unformed mass, or *golem*, that is, a bundle of inchoate matter.”⁹⁵ From this unformed mass the multiple and spiritual levels or “four worlds” of creation between *Ein-Sof* and the earthly cosmos develop: Emanation, Creation, Formation, and Actualization.⁹⁶ This formless matter is given shape and dimension like a potter working clay when *Ein-Sof* sends a ray of light into the *tehiru* “to serve as a medium of organization so as to structure creation through the development of ten particular lights (*sefirot*) that would suffuse the four worlds.”⁹⁷

After the first act of self-limitation and withdrawal, a second divine act, one of emanation, occurs. It is at this point that Luria’s theory dovetails into and modifies the classical sefirotic and emanational system of kabbalah. God sends out a ray of light into the *tehiru*, taking the shape of the *sefirot* and thus beginning “his unfolding as God the Creator, in the primordial space of His own creation.”⁹⁸ This emanation of the divine light is pictured and named in a number of ways in the various versions of the myth: the “ten fingers,” the divine “hand,” “straight line,” and “first vessel.” In one favored account, the *sefirot* assume the form of *Adam Kadmon*. Rays of divine lights stream forth from certain parts of his body, creating vessels which give eternal shapes and specific characteristics to each sefirotic emanation. This illustrates Luria’s proclivity to imagine divinity in

⁹⁵Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 130, 131.

⁹⁶No mention of these four worlds is made in the major part of the *Zohar*, although Cordovero and the Safed kabbalists had adopted them from earlier kabbalists. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 272.

⁹⁷Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 131.

⁹⁸Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 261.

blatantly anthropomorphic terms.⁹⁹ According to Vital's account in which the roots of *Din* are gathered into the form of a *golem*, the light enters the *tehiru* and forms ten "vessels" (*kelim*) from the mixture of *reshimu* and *golem*. In all versions of the myth, the vessels are intended to be containers and channels in and through which the divine lights would flow. Fine explains how Luria's myth begins to merge with and adapt the classical kabbalistic cosmology:

The function of the vessels was to contain and conduct the ten different gradations of the reemergent divine light, that is, the ten *sefirot*. These vessels not only contain sefirotic light but should themselves be thought of as being composed of thicker or denser light. The sefirotic light within these vessels, in turn, proceeded to penetrate the four worlds in a continuous dialectical process of descent and reascent. It conducted light into the four worlds, then departed, only to return once again in an ongoing pattern of egression and regression (*ratso ve-shov*).¹⁰⁰

This act, according to Scholem, sets in motion the perpetual two-fold movement of emanation and retraction, of egression and regression, within the cosmic process. In Lurianic thinking this continual process of ebb and flow is the paradigmatic way in which the divine light moves and functions. The kabbalists refer to this back-and-forth movement between God and the whole of creation, of light which flows out from God and streams back to God, as *histalkuth* and *hithpashtuth* respectively, and conceive of it as "a gigantic process of divine inhalation and exhalation" on which the universe depends.¹⁰¹ Thus, for Luria, creation is conceived of as a double activity involving *tzimtzum* and the emanation of *Ein-Sof*. The former signals a divine retreat allowing a blessed space where the different elements within the Godhead are separated and where

⁹⁹Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 132.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁰¹Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 261, 263. See also Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 133.

other reality can now come into being. The latter indicates an egressive and form-giving force that seeks “to integrate these now separated elements into the general scheme of the creation, and thus turn them into useful, cooperative forces supporting the wishes of the Godhead.”¹⁰²

After these first two divine acts, Luria’s system radically diverges from the Zohar and other kabbalistic texts. According to Luria, a cosmic catastrophe occurs as a result of the emanation of the light of *Ein Sof* into the *tehiru*, as the light fills the ten vessels within each of the four worlds. The vessels break. As mentioned above, the “breaking of the vessels” is called the *shevirat ha kelim*. Again, there are different explanations as to why the cosmic rupture takes place. Whether it is because the lower vessels lack the strength to conduct the light properly or because the light is defective in some way, for our purposes here, it is enough to know that in the process of the descending sefirotic emanation, as the divine creative force is expressing itself in the fullest manner creating and pouring itself into the vessels, the vessels are not able to hold the divine lights flowing into them, causing them to break. The result is that the divine harmony is disrupted, the *Shekinah* is exiled, and the divine sparks fall downward into the physical universe where they are surrounded by hard shells of darkness or negative evil (*kelippot*). Whereas the highest *sefirah*, *Keter*, is pure and strong enough to be able to hold the light, and the next two, *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, do not break but are damaged somewhat and fall from their proper cosmic position to a lower level, the other lower *sefirot* do not possess the capacity to bear the divine light and thus shatter. Lawrence Fine writes:

These shattered vessels, now called *qelippot* (“shells” or “shards”), fell and became the basis for our world of material reality. While most of the sefirotic light that these lower vessels had contained ascended above,

¹⁰²Dan, Jewish Mysticism, 95-96.

returning to its source, some of the light remained trapped, *clinging* to the broken shards. This had the effect of endowing the shards with a degree of continuing vitality and strength. In the archetypal language of Isaac Luria, this imprisoned light consisted of “288 sparks.”¹⁰³

Fine continues:

Here we have one of the quintessential images to emerge from Lurianic mysticism: particles of divine light have *fallen* into the material world, utterly alienated and estranged from their sublime and transcendent origin. These sparks of light instinctively long to be liberated and reunited with the divine source from which they originally flowed.¹⁰⁴

Some versions of Luria’s myth suggest that the *shevirat* was the result of the elements of *Din* in the *golem* resisting the process of emanation by refusing to cooperate in the constructive process of creation. The result is to gain their own realm in the lower part of the *tehiru* where they now exist as the powers of evil that developed from the scattered fragments of the vessels. This aspect of Luria’s thinking resembles the Zoharic conception of evil as being a by-product of the totalitarian tendencies or imbalance of strict judgment (*Din*). Joseph Dan writes:

These elements, following the breaking of the vessels, did not remain in their potential state; they now actively expressed themselves, and are worthy of their proper name: the powers of evil.¹⁰⁵

In Lurianic kabbalah, after the *shevirat* the cosmos is divided into two realms: the realm of the divine lights in the upper part where the pure light of God escaped to preserve its purity and the kingdom of evil in the lower part where the broken vessels, unable to hold the light from *Ein-Sof*, subsist. Since evil is understood by Luria as the opposite of existence, it cannot exist on its own power but rather must derive spiritual

¹⁰³Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 135.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁰⁵Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, 96.

force from the remaining good divine lights. The evil powers “achieve this by keeping captive those sparks of the divine light that fell with them when the vessels were broken, which thereafter give sustenance to the satanic realm.”¹⁰⁶ This sets in motion the cosmic struggle that exists between the divine and the forces of evil.

The breaking of the vessels also sets in motion the divine desire and effort to mend itself and the cosmos through a process called *tikkun* (mending, healing, restoration), the third provocative symbol in Lurianic thought. As the evil powers try to sustain themselves by keeping captive the sparks of divine light, the divine repeats the process of emanation in the hopes of finally bringing about the unity it originally hoped to attain for all existence. Fine writes:

Instead of emanating in the comparatively simple form of ten *sefirot*, divine light now reorganized itself into five major configurations or *partsufim* (literally, “faces” or “countenances”), under which the *sefirot* were subsumed. These five *partsufim* were intended to possess the stability and strength that the earlier manifestations of light lacked.¹⁰⁷

Here Luria reconfigures the ten *sefirot* by identifying them with the various five *partsufim*, or “faces” of God or of *Adam Kadmon*. As in the *Zohar*, this new structure is especially explained in masculine and feminine terms, using the language of human sexuality, physiology, romantic and erotic relationships between certain *partsufim*, and the interrelationship of all the figures to describe the divine process of *tikkun*, of “raising the sparks” and thereby returning the four worlds and everything in existence to a state of spiritual balance and perfection.¹⁰⁸ Fine writes:

The project facing the mystical adepts of the Lurianic school was not only

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 138.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 139-41.

to reverse the consequences of these primordial events, but also to bring about a new cosmos in which divine light in all of its forms would be restored to its source, divested of any vestige of impurity.¹⁰⁹

For Luria this process occurs partly within God and partly within humankind.

According to Luria, all the events mentioned thus far, *tzimtzum*, *shevirat ha kelim*, the *partsufim*, and the initiation of *tikkun* occur before the creation of Adam and Eve and therefore are independent of humanity. Yet, humankind is implicated in and necessary to the completion of *tikkun*, because of Adam's sin. In Luria's myth, when Adam is born as the offspring of two *partsufim*, the cosmic and divine mending is already well underway.¹¹⁰ Earthly Adam, whose soul Luria teaches is made up of virtually all the future souls of humankind, is expected to accomplish the final stages of *tikkun*.¹¹¹ However, as the *sefirot* are ascending from the depths to their originally intended places in the cosmic structure, Adam commits his transgression by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, thus paralleling and replicating on an anthropological level what has taken place on the theosophical level in the course of *shevirat ha kelim*.¹¹² For Luria, Adam reflects symbolically the dualism that exists within the cosmos, possessing a sacred soul but a body that represented the forces of evil. Dan explains:

The divine intention was that Adam, by overcoming the evil in him and making divine goodness victorious, would bring forth the downfall of Satan and all his realm. When Adam failed in his mission and committed the first sin, a disaster followed, similar to the original *shevirah*: instead of the divine sparks captive in the kingdom of evil being saved and uplifted,

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 142.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 144. In Lurianic kabbalah, Adam, understood as the first man, *Adam ha-Rishon*, is patterned after the primordial being, *Adam Kadmon*, and as such is a microcosmic embodiment of the divine Anthropos.

¹¹¹Ibid., 187, 192.

¹¹²Ibid., 144.

many new divine lights fell down as a result of Adam's action, evil became even stronger, and the victory of good over evil more remote and more difficult.¹¹³

Luria maintains that, had Adam not sinned on the sixth day, the completion of the cosmic mending would have occurred on the afternoon of the first Sabbath bringing unity to all existence. The final redemption and eternal Sabbath would have been a reality, returning all things to their original and rightful place. Instead, Adam's sin again hurls all the worlds from their pedestals and again sends the *Shekinah* into exile. At this point Lurianic kabbalah merges with the message of the Torah. As a consequence of one man's sin, there is a continuing need for *tikkun* and so God chooses a people, the people Israel, to accomplish the work Adam failed to complete by vanquishing evil and freeing and raising the captive divine sparks.¹¹⁴ According to Luria, every human action performed with *kavanah* (i.e. with the inner purpose towards participating in the restoration of the original harmony) is infused with a mystical function that gives it a special dignity. Now the true purpose of Torah is understood as bringing the *Shekinah* back from exile and uniting her to her source or spouse. Scholem maintains that as a consequence deeds done in this way are *actions* not merely acts.¹¹⁵

Scholem also holds that the theosophical idea of *tikkun* has been as great an influence on later kabbalistic thought as the concepts of *tzimtzum* and *shevirat ha kelim*.¹¹⁶

¹¹³Ibid., 96-97.

¹¹⁴Heschel, writing not only to believing and practicing Jews but also to people of other faiths and to human persons of no faith but citizens of this world, has the unique ability, on the one hand, to appeal to Jews by promoting the concept of *tikkun* and the capacity of every holy action to affect the course of transcendent events, and on the other hand, to challenge others as concerned human beings to appreciate the relevance and power of good deeds to positively affect this world. See Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's*, 69-74.

¹¹⁵Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 275.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 265.

Joseph Dan goes so far as to claim:

The concept of the *tikkun* is the most powerful idea ever presented in Jewish thought, which expressed an intense messianic endeavor of cosmic dimensions, and its consequences cover all aspects of the individual religious and ethical life.¹¹⁷

Whether an overstatement or not, Dan's forceful judgment serves to highlight the radical conviction of Lurianic kabbalah: God alone is not responsible for the cosmic reparation and the return of all things to their original contact with God. Although Luria's cosmogony is somewhat complicated and may appear extraneous to this project, it is important if we are to understand Heschel's emphasis on divine pathos and his insistence that humanity, let alone the people of Israel, are called to participate in the ongoing work of *tikkun* which, I believe, is a constitutive dimension of a mystical-prophetic pastoral care. The individual believer and the people of Israel are not incidental to divine and cosmic restoration but "are responsible for bringing about the terrestrial redemption and the celestial correction."¹¹⁸ Scholem sums it up this way:

The historical process and its innermost soul, the religious act of the Jew, prepare the way for the final restitution of all the scattered and exiled lights and sparks. The Jew who is in close contact with the divine life through the Torah, the fulfillment of the commandments, and through prayer, has it in his power to accelerate or to hinder this process. Every act of man is related to this final task which God has set for His creatures.

It follows from this that for Luria the appearance of the Messiah is nothing but the consummation of the continuous process of Restoration, of *Tikkun*. The true nature of redemption is therefore mystical, and its historical and national aspects are merely ancillary symptoms which constitute a visible symbol of its consummation. The redemption of Israel concludes the redemption of all things, for does not redemption mean that everything is put in its proper place, that the original blemish is removed? The 'world of *Tikkun*' is therefore the world of Messianic action. The coming of the Messiah means that this world of *Tikkun* has received its

¹¹⁷Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, 98.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*

final shape.¹¹⁹

Thus, in Lurianic terms, *tikkun* and redemption are one and the same action of salvation requiring both divine and human involvement.

For Luria, the primary methods for human participation in repairing the cosmos or hastening the coming of the Messiah are through contemplative and ritual practices, especially devotional prayer, the study and recitation of the Torah (*Talmud torah*), allegiance to *halakha* (Jewish law) through faithful adherence to the 613 precepts or commandments (*mitzvot*) in the Torah, and the giving of charity (*tsedakah*).¹²⁰ The enactment of these precepts and practices are viewed both as the weapons in the cosmic struggle between good and evil and as a way of positively affecting the repair of the universe. Every good and reverent action frees the divine sparks and lifts them upwards, separating them from evil powers and thereby diminishing evil's ability to exist. Conversely, every irreverent thought, every unkind word or action, every injustice done, every justice not done, every sin committed, strengthens evil.

Luria's recommendations for the means for participating in and accomplishing *tikkun* are the old, traditional precepts of religion and ethics. What is novel are the spiritual reasons for the performance of these demands.¹²¹ Luria emphasizes not merely observing the *mitzvot* but rather performing them with intense enthusiasm and joy while infusing them with mystical and cosmic significance. Since in Lurianic Kabbalah, the human person is conceived of as a *micro-cosmos*, each and every action, no matter how

¹¹⁹Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 274.

¹²⁰Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 188. Fine points out that it is because of the Lurianic kabbalist's meticulous observance of the *mitzvot* that they were able to stay within the traditional fold of Judaism despite holding quite radical mythic and theological notions.

¹²¹Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, 103.

seemingly insignificant, is restorative and serves not only to instigate the perfection of the individual person's soul but also "to unite the name of the Holy One, blessed be He [i.e., *Tiferet*] with His *Shekinah*."¹²² Fine explains, "The mitzvot do not simply reflect the *sefirot*; their enactment influences them, reorganizes them into their properly balanced configuration."¹²³ More often than not, these potent actions contributing to a cosmic realignment are understood in terms of bringing about a *hieros gamos*, a holy marriage, between the divine masculine and feminine, *Tiferet* and *Malkhut* (*Shekinah*), and impact and reinterpret every aspect of life, offering, for example, not only the theological explanation for the Sabbath but even for sexual intercourse as well. Similarly, the *mitzvah* of charity (*tsedakah*), not only accomplishes an intrinsic good but more so, when practiced with contemplative attention, is viewed as bringing together this same intimate union exemplified in sexual union.¹²⁴ Lurianic Kabbalah is guided and fuelled by holy intention. As a result, prayer and charity, Sabbath and sexuality, Torah and ethical behavior lived out in one's family, community, and society, and enacted consciously as the process of working toward *tikkun*, represent "the complete fusion between Jewish mysticism and Jewish ethics," assuming an intensity of cosmic meaning and symbolic significance never before achieved in Judaism.¹²⁵ Dan writes:

Anyone accepting the symbolism of Lurianic Kabbalah can have no more

¹²²Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 193-94.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 191.

¹²⁴Fine points out that the *Zohar*, while showing a clear concern for the sefirotic consequences of giving charity, emphasizes more than Luria the actual poor and their plight. "The poor individual is identified as *Tsedeq*, that is, he signifies the *Shekinah* and is linked to Her, for like Her, he too has nothing of his own, but depends upon others for his sustenance. The poor person is likened to one who is dead, just as the *Shekinah* is "dead" when separated from the source of Her nourishment, *Tiferet*. But when someone has compassion for him and gives him charity, the Tree of Life, *Tiferet*, hovers over him. Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 207.

¹²⁵Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, 98, 100.

doubts concerning the reasons for the various ethical and religious demands of the Jewish way of life. Each act represents the redemption of a spark from exile in the realm of evil, and the totality of the process represents the redemption of the Jewish people as a whole from exilic existence, and the arrival of the messiah.

The Lurianic system also removed the sense of triviality and tediousness from religious and ethical behavior. Every repetition is not really one more prayer or righteous act; it represents the freeing of a new, fresh spark from its captivity. The struggle between the good God and Satan therefore gives fresh impetus to every old, mundane custom or demand.¹²⁶

Dan also points out that the consequence of understanding these devout and good actions, on the one hand, or moral lapses and ignominious actions, on the other hand, as charged with mystical and cosmic significance, is that it prevents the motivation from focusing mainly or exclusively on personal perfection and instead orients the individual toward an attitude of participating in the common struggle of the Jewish people (and, Heschel would add, the common struggle of humanity). No deed done or left undone belongs solely to the individual. The entire community, as well as the cosmic chain is involved and affected. This sense of the collective and communal influences Luria's understanding of repentance as well, implying that "every Jew can and should repent because of the sins of everybody else, including past and future generations."¹²⁷ This notion is a precursor to Heschel's prophetic proclamation that "some are guilty, all are responsible," which appears in a variety of places in his writing and speaking, for example, in his statement against the Vietnam War.¹²⁸

As will become clearer later in this work, although Heschel understands God to be

¹²⁶Ibid., 102.

¹²⁷Ibid., 101.

¹²⁸ Abraham J. Heschel, "The Moral Outrage of Vietnam," in Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience, authored by Robert McAfee Brown, Abraham J Heschel, and Michael Novak. (New York: Association

the ultimate Redeemer, one urgent and consistent message throughout his writings is the decisive effect and the fundamental relevance of human actions on both the God of history and the history of humankind. Heschel, devout in his Jewishness, but aware of the expansiveness of his audience, seems to extend these kabbalistic notions, especially *tikkun*, its responsibility and its benefits, to others as well. He writes:

According to the Kabbalah, redemption is not an event that will take place all at once at “the end of days” nor something that concerns the Jewish people alone. It is a continual process, taking place at every moment. Man’s good deeds are single acts in the long drama of redemption, and not only the people of Israel, but the whole universe must be redeemed.¹²⁹

Throughout his work, Heschel stresses that what is incumbent upon Jews for religious reasons, is mandatory for humans if those human beings have any desire or hope of attaining a sense of significant being.

Let us turn now from these elements in Jewish mysticism to the overtures of God’s presence as presented especially in the biblical tradition. Focusing our attention on the transcendental themes of the ineffable and mystery and the two corresponding human responses, wonder and awe, we will begin to establish the biblical basis for a mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral theology and care.

The Sublime

Heschel emphasizes that human being allows and calls for relationship. To be a person one must be intentionally engaged in life and the things of life. To be a religious being involves living responsively, turning toward and interacting with the natural world,

Press, 1967), 50. This sentence or a variation of it is found in various works by Heschel. See, for example, Prophets, 19.

¹²⁹Heschel, Earth is the Lord’s, 72.

others, and God. Heschel contends that being human requires “a new openness to certain aspects of experience to which modern man has generally become oblivious.”¹³⁰ These aspects of reality, whose ultimate meaning is unfathomable, are nonetheless able to be experienced. For Heschel, religion, and more specifically, Judaism, instruct not only an openness to these deep dimensions of reality but also offer a corresponding way of relating to them.

In his presentation of a philosophy of religion in Man Is Not Alone, Heschel begins his study with a section titled, “The Sense of the Ineffable.” Not surprisingly, after a short section on the self-understanding of Judaism, he begins his companion volume, God in Search of Man, a study on the philosophy of Judaism, with a chapter called, “Ways to His Presence,” followed by a chapter titled simply, “The Sublime.” Together, the opening pages of these two major works on religion lay the foundation for Heschel’s conviction that the actualization of one’s humanness and the awareness of the divine begin with wonder. However, wonder itself is a response and therefore precipitated by something prior. Wonder is born in the experience of the wondrous, which ignites the initial spark of humanization. “Religion begins with the sense of the ineffable,” says Heschel, “with the awareness of a reality that discredits our wisdom, that shatters our concepts. It is, therefore, the ineffable with which we must begin.”¹³¹ Religion is the human person’s quest for the God who searches for humanity. It originates not as a direct experience with divine essence but rather as a response to hints of the holy by which

¹³⁰Rothschild, Between God and Man, 12.

¹³¹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 59.

humans “find the entrance to the essence.”¹³² The ineffable is an enigmatic yet holy hint, a sacred suggestion.

In God in Search of Man, Heschel presents three ways that humans can experience the divine presence. “The first is the way of sensing the presence of God in the world, in things; the second is the way of sensing His presence in the Bible; and the third is the way of sensing His presence in sacred deeds.”¹³³ Each of these ways corresponds to the main aspects of Jewish and religious existence: worship, learning, and action. Heschel emphasizes that rather than being three separate avenues to divine presence they are all part of the one way to the one destination: “the God of nature is the God of history, and the way to know Him is to do His will.”¹³⁴ He continues, “to recapture the insights found in those three ways is to go to the roots of biblical experience of life and reality.”¹³⁵ To be aware of the ineffable is to partake of the first way of sensing God’s presence.

In Man Is Not Alone, Heschel uses the term *the ineffable*. In God in Search of Man, he prefers the term *the sublime* to describe “the way to an awareness of God through beholding the world here and now.”¹³⁶ Essentially, they are synonyms, and Heschel frequently uses them interchangeably. However, Heschel also uses the term ineffable in a more expansive sense than sublime, to refer to what elsewhere he calls “the holy dimension” which is inclusive of the transcendental themes, sublimity, mystery, and

¹³²Ibid., 7.

¹³³Heschel, God in Search of Man, 31.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 33.

glory and their subsequent replies: humility, wonder, awe, reverence, indebtedness, gratefulness, praise, and faith. I will enunciate here Heschel's understanding of the sublime and the ineffable and then describe the inner response it evokes.

Heschel begins his explanation of the sublime by recalling that Longinus, in the oldest treatise on the subject, On the Sublime, locates "*the inward greatness of the human soul*" in the human ability to recognize and respond to sublimity. "Nature planted in the human soul an invincible love of grandeur, and a desire to emulate whatever seems to approach nearer to divinity than himself."¹³⁷ Heschel agrees with this view:

Our tendency to make everything explicit, to explain the world as though everything were level and smooth, flat and bare, deprives the world of its aspect of grandeur which is indispensable to the ennoblement of man."¹³⁸

Heschel contrasts his understanding of sublimity with Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. Burke, and others who follow, contrast sublimity with the beautiful, the former signifying "the vast, the terrible, and the obscure which arouse the feeling of pain and terror," while the latter refers to "the smooth, the small, and the delicate which arouse a feeling of love and tenderness."¹³⁹ Kant, on the other hand, contrasts the sublime with the small, locating it in nature and there only in the overwhelming: threatening rocks, clouds, lightning, thunder, volcanoes, hurricanes, boundless oceans, lofty waterfalls.¹⁴⁰

Using the biblical view of reality as his guide, Heschel contends that the sublime is not opposed to the beautiful.¹⁴¹ It is not an esthetic category at all, although things of

¹³⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 37.

¹³⁸Heschel, "Children and Youth," in Insecurity of Freedom 47. See Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 60.

¹³⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 38.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 38-39.

¹⁴¹The contemporary temptation seems to be the opposite: to limit the sublime to the beautiful.

beauty may initiate an experience of the sublime. Heschel also asserts that the sublime is not determined by its vastness, located solely in inanimate objects, or perceived exclusively in the overwhelming and threatening in nature. Instead, he argues, the sublime “may be sensed in every grain of sand, in every drop of water. Every flower in the summer, every snow flake in the winter, may arouse in us the sense of wonder that is our response to the sublime.”¹⁴²

Thus, one essential characteristic of the sublime or the ineffable is that it is capable of turning up anywhere, and is not limited to the overwhelming or the grandiose.

Heschel instructs:

The ineffable inhabits the magnificent and the common, the grandiose and the tiny facts of reality alike. Some people sense this quality at distant intervals in extraordinary events; others sense it in ordinary events, in every fold, in every nook; day after day, hour after hour. To them things are bereft of triteness; to them being does not mate with non-sense. They hear the stillness that crowds the world in spite of our noise, in spite of our greed. Slight and simple as things may be—a piece of paper, a morsel of bread, a word, a sigh—they hide and guard a never-ending secret: A glimpse of God? Kinship with the spirit of being? An eternal flash of the will?¹⁴³

By the ineffable or the sublime, Heschel means that aspect of reality, that depth of life present in the magnificent and the mundane, concealed yet revealed, which we can experience but not fully understand, that we can sense but not adequately communicate.

He states:

The sense of the ineffable is not an esoteric faculty but an ability with which all men are endowed; it is potentially as common as sight or as the ability to form syllogisms. For just as man is endowed with the ability to know certain aspects of reality, he is endowed with the ability to know that there is more than he knows.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 39.

¹⁴³Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 5.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 19-20.

Later, he continues:

We are struck with an awareness of the immense preciousness of being; a preciousness which is not an object of analysis but a cause of wonder; it is inexplicable, nameless, and cannot be specified or put in one of our categories. Yet, we have a *certainty without knowledge*: it is real without being expressible.¹⁴⁵

What is unusual about the sense of the sublime is that what we perceive and experience we cannot express. Says Heschel, "The greatest experiences are those for which we have no expression."¹⁴⁶

What characterizes man is not only his ability to develop words and symbols, but also his being compelled to draw a distinction between the utterable and the unutterable, to be stunned by that which is but cannot be put into words. . . . A sensitive person knows that the intrinsic, the most essential, is never expressed.¹⁴⁷

By its very nature, the ineffable "lies beyond our comprehension, and is acknowledged by the mind to be beyond the scope of the mind."¹⁴⁸ It is that aspect of reality that cannot be grasped by humans but instead grasps them. It is necessarily elusive and cannot be captured by sheer intellectual prowess. "The sense of the ineffable," says Heschel, "is out of place where we measure, where we weigh."¹⁴⁹ Yet it makes itself known and is available to persons by direct experience. States Heschel:

The sublime is that which we see but are unable to convey. It is the silent allusion of things to a meaning greater than themselves. It is that which all things ultimately stand for; . . . It is that which our words, our forms, our categories can never reach. This is why the sense of the sublime must be regarded as the root of man's creative activities in art, thought, and noble living.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 22; Heschel, God in Search of Man, 106.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁸Heschel, God in Search of Man, 104.

¹⁴⁹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 8.

¹⁵⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 39.

Heschel emphasizes that although the ineffable “cannot be conceived by the mind nor captured by imagination or feeling,” its perception is of an *objective* reality. He explains:

What we are primarily aware of is not our self, our inner mood, but a transubjective situation, in regard to which ability fails. Subjective is the *manner*, not the *matter* of our perception. . . . you and I have not invented the grandeur of the sky nor endowed man with the mystery of birth and death. We do not create the ineffable, we encounter it.¹⁵¹

What is it, then, that humans encounter when they sense the sublime or awaken to the ineffable?

Although Heschel does refer to “a sense of the sublime,” elsewhere he clarifies that notion by explaining that it is not actually the sublime, as a measurable entity, of which we are aware. This is because the sublime does not refer to the object itself (e.g. the volcano, the hurricane, a morsel of bread, the sunset) but rather to an implied relationship with something greater of which it is the referent. It is into this special intimation that the sublime draws us. Heschel explains:

The sublime is but a way in which things react to the presence of God. It is never an ultimate aspect of reality, a quality meaningful in itself. It stands for something greater; it stands in relation to something beyond itself that the eye can never see.

The sublime is not simply there. It is not a thing, a quality, but rather a happening, an act of God, a marvel. Thus even a mountain is not regarded as a thing. What seems to be stone is a drama; what seems to be natural is wondrous. There are no sublime facts; there are only divine *acts*.¹⁵²

To sense the sublime is to be aware of these inexplicable happenings and to participate consciously in the dramas that suggest a sacred though hidden presence. Heschel contends:

¹⁵¹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 20.

¹⁵²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 40.

What we encounter in our perception of the sublime, in our radical amazement, is a spiritual suggestiveness of reality, an *allusiveness* to transcendent meaning. The world in its grandeur is full of a spiritual radiance, for which we have neither name nor concept.¹⁵³

It is this allusiveness, this spiritual suggestiveness that is perhaps the most important and noteworthy dimension of the ineffable and the sublime. This dimension of the ineffable makes it the beginning point of religion and essential for becoming human. What they allude to is transcendent meaning and transcendent meaning is an allusion to the presence of God. "The sense of the ineffable introduces the soul to the divine aspect of the universe, to a reality higher than the universe," says Heschel.¹⁵⁴ "It is the ineffable from which we draw the taste of the sacred, the joy of the imperishable."¹⁵⁵ According to Heschel, that "the sense of the ineffable is an awareness of meaning is indicated by the fact that the inner response it evokes is that of awe or reverence."¹⁵⁶

In summary, the markers identifying the ineffable are that it presents itself anywhere, defies and exceeds intellectual comprehension, resists expression, but can be sensed and experienced. Especially, the ineffable and sublime allude to a meaning and significance greater than themselves, a transcendent reality that evokes a commensurate response. This is the prelude to faith and the genesis of mysticism.

Wonder

Throughout Rabbi Heschel's major works and in his many essays and talks, he uses the words wonder, awe, and radical amazement to describe a fundamental religious

¹⁵³Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 22.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 23.

attitude toward reality. Closely associated with these specific attitudes are the attitudes of humility or existential embarrassment, reverence, indebtedness, gratefulness, and praise. Although similar, wonder and awe are more kith and kin than identical twins. Wonder and awe are the intimately related but distinguishable responses that correspond to the complementary realities of sublimity and mystery, themselves two similar expressions of one reality. Similar to his use of the terms sublime and ineffable, Heschel uses the words wonder and radical amazement interchangeably, although at times he uses the term radical amazement to refer to the broader human experience encompassing wonder, awe, reverence, humility, and embarrassment.

Wonder is the fitting response to the ineffable, to “that which lies, within our reach but beyond our grasp.”¹⁵⁷ According to Heschel, radical amazement is “the chief characteristic” of the religious person’s attitude toward life and is one of the great legacies that religion itself bequeaths to its practitioners. Heschel maintains, “The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living.”¹⁵⁸ For the religious person, wonder is not merely an emotion but rather a choice to notice and respond to the sublime dimension of reality. Heschel warns, “The surest way to suppress our ability to understand the meaning of God and the importance of worship is *to take things for granted*. Indifference to the sublime wonder of living is the root of sin.”¹⁵⁹ It is this refusal, and the presumption that fuels it, that Heschel considers the primal sin of humanity, not pride. Or perhaps the refusal to pay attention, to behold, to be

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 37; Heschel, God in Search of Man, 46.

¹⁵⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 43.

appreciative and grateful is at the heart of pride. For inherent in the refusal to be moved, to be surprised, is the resistance to be human. "We take it . . . for granted," Heschel argues, "that a person who is not affected by the vision of earth and sky, who has no eyes to see the grandeur of nature and to sense the sublime, however vaguely, is not human. . . . It is unworthy of man not to take notice of the sublime."¹⁶⁰ To take things for granted rather than to take notice of the sublime, insists Heschel, is not the result of being human, but instead is "one attitude alien to [the human] spirit."¹⁶¹ The absence of radical amazement in the human person is "a sign of half-hearted, listless mind, of an undeveloped sense of the depth of things."¹⁶² Not to wonder is to say "No!" to one's humanity, to disregard not only the sublime but also to refuse the gift and to reject the opportunity to become human.¹⁶³

Before it is anything else, wonder is the response to the sublime mystery of being itself. Before it is a reaction to something "out there," it is the sheer dismay that there is anything at all. Before it is the knowledge of something or the conceptualization of what we perceive, it is the simple and unreserved amazement that we know or perceive in the first place. "The most incomprehensible fact is that we comprehend at all," says Heschel. He adds:

To find an approximate cause of a phenomenon is no answer to [the human's] ultimate wonder. He knows that there are laws that regulate the course of natural processes; he is aware of the regularity and pattern of things. However, such knowledge fails to mitigate his sense of perpetual surprise at the fact that there are

¹⁶⁰Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 3.

¹⁶¹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 45.

¹⁶²Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 21.

¹⁶³For persons of faith, the unwillingness to wonder, as we shall see, is also a rejection of God.

facts at all.¹⁶⁴

Elsewhere he continues along similar lines. He states:

... *being is unbelievable*. We are amazed at seeing anything at all; amazed not only at particular values and things but *at the unexpectedness of being as such*, at the fact that there is being at all.¹⁶⁵

For Heschel, wonder is the evidence gleaned from actual living that nothing is taken for granted, not even being itself, not even our ability to wonder.

“Wonder,” claims Heschel, “rather than doubt is the root of knowledge.”¹⁶⁶ John Merkle summarizes Heschel’s challenge to the accepted claim that knowledge begins with doubt. He writes:

Wonder, or the insight of wonder, lies at the origin of thought. Doubt is a subsequent movement within the process of thinking. The insight of wonder is a primary or immediate awareness, an intuitive or perceptive understanding. Only after this insight has been conceptualized does doubt have a role to play within the process of thinking or in the acquisition and testing of knowledge.¹⁶⁷

Here again, Heschel is influenced by Hasidism’s appreciation of wonderment and is guided by a biblical worldview in which wonder precedes and has place of priority over doubt:

There is no word in Biblical Hebrew for doubt; there are many expressions for wonder. Just as in dealing with judgments our starting point is doubt, wonder is the Biblical starting point in facing reality. The Biblical man’s sense for mind-surpassing grandeur of reality prevented the power of doubt from setting up its own independent dynasty. Doubt is an act in which the mind inspects its own ideas; wonder is an act in which the mind confronts the universe.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴Heschel, God in Search of Man, 45.

¹⁶⁵Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 12.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶⁷Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 160.

¹⁶⁸Heschel, God in Search of Man, 98.

Wonder is not “a substitute for analysis where analysis is possible,” nor is it intended to “stifle doubt where doubt is legitimate.”¹⁶⁹ Both doubt and analysis are helpful and important to human thinking but become obstacles to authentic living when they exceed their capabilities. Because we are dealing with “the reality of ineffable meaning” and therefore with the meaning of being itself, humans must “remember the fundamental fact of a universal non-discursive perception of the ineffable which is a sense of transcendent meaning, of an awareness that something is meant by the universe which surpasses our power of comprehension.”¹⁷⁰

Radical amazement counters any tendency to analyze, objectify, or label what only can be encountered, appreciated, and revered. States Heschel, “To become aware of the ineffable is to part company with words. The essence, the tangent to the curve of human experience, lies beyond the limits of language.”¹⁷¹ He maintains:

He who is sluggish will berate doubt; he who is blind will berate wonder. Doubt may come to an end, wonder lasts forever. . . .

Even before we conceptualize what we perceive, we are amazed beyond words, beyond doubts. We may doubt anything, except that we are struck with amazement. When in doubt we raise questions; when in wonder, we do not even know how to ask a question. Doubts may be resolved, radical amazement can never be erased. There is no answer in the world to man’s radical amazement.¹⁷²

Because for Heschel a biblical interpretation of wonder is intimately related to knowledge not as information but as transcendent meaning, it cannot be apprehended by doubt and discursive thinking but only sensed by personal involvement. It is what

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 51.

¹⁷⁰Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 62.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 16.

¹⁷²Ibid., 12-13.

Heschel calls “knowledge by appreciation.”¹⁷³ Wonder is an essential way in which humans court meaning in order to be engaged to it.¹⁷⁴ “A way of going beyond what is given in thing and thought, refusing to take anything for granted, to regard anything as final, “wonder “is our honest response to the grandeur and the mystery of reality, our confrontation with that which transcends the given.”¹⁷⁵ Wonder presumes an encounter and goes beyond knowledge or the known where reason ends. Consequently, it cannot consist in merely comprehending a notion. It is in fact, because “wonder is the result of what man does with his higher incomprehension.”¹⁷⁶

Transcendent meaning must not be reduced to an object of acknowledgment, to saying “yes” to an idea. The experience of a meaning is an experience of vital involvement, not having an idea in mind but living within a spirit of meaning, but sharing a dimension open to all human beings.¹⁷⁷

Wonder is proof that humans refuse to live on borrowed or inherited knowledge, resisting the lazy temptation “to look at reality through the latticework of our memorized knowledge.”¹⁷⁸ Wonder is maladjustment to the familiar, the predictable, the mental clichés, and the tired words and conventional notions that accompany them. Taking nothing for granted, wonder instead receives everything as gift, and is “a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of that which is.”¹⁷⁹

What sets radical amazement apart from all other human acts, Heschel believes, is

¹⁷³Ibid., 35.

¹⁷⁴Heschel, Who Is Man?, 79.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 78-79.

¹⁷⁶Heschel, God in Search of Man, 46.

¹⁷⁷Heschel, Who Is Man?, 79.

¹⁷⁸Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 12.

¹⁷⁹Ibid, 11; Heschel, God in Search of Man, 46.

the unlimited breadth of its scope. He states:

While any act of perception or cognition has as its object a selected segment of reality, radical amazement refers to all of reality; not only to what we see, but also to the very act of seeing as well as to our own selves, to the selves that see and are amazed at their ability to see.¹⁸⁰

To wonder is to sense the hidden preciousness in all being, not merely in the extraordinary or the magnificent. To the person of wonder, the sublime is “potentially present in every perception, every act of thinking and every enjoyment or valuation of reality.”¹⁸¹

Plato maintained that philosophy begins with the feeling of wonder. Aristotle later concurred and, Heschel points out, to this day rational wonder is considered the prelude to knowledge, “*semen scientiae*,” the seed of knowledge.¹⁸² Heschel, writing not merely as the philosopher but as the theologian and man of deep faith, extends this view by asserting that wonder is also the beginning of religion. One type of wonder is actually curiosity. The other type is radical amazement. The former accepts and does not go beyond what is given. The latter sees and seeks the inference in all reality. Pointing out the difference between wonder as intellectual curiosity and wonder as radical amazement, he indicates that the former is the starting point of science, while the latter is “the genesis of faith.” Science dwells in the world of concepts, explanations, and technical language. Radical amazement dwells in the realm of religion and poetry and acknowledges a reality for which reason has no concepts and language has no names. Heschel describes it as follows:

¹⁸⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 46; Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 13.

¹⁸¹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 20.

¹⁸²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 45; Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 13.

To intercept the allusions that are submerged in perceptibilities, the interstitial values that never rise to the surface, the indefinable dimension of all existence, is the venture of true poetry. This is why poetry is to religion what analysis is to science, and it is certainly no accident that the Bible was not written *more geometrico* but in the language of poets. However, the ineffable as sensed by the artist is anonymous, it is like a foundling. To the religious man nothing is ever deserted or unclaimed; it is as if God stood between him and the world. The most familiar retires from his sight, and he discerns the original beneath the palimpsests of things.¹⁸³

To wonder is to experience life not as a scientific researcher observing a controlled study but as a poet who knowing the power and paucity of words nonetheless densely uses them to say more about what can never be adequately named but only suggested. Perhaps a better image, one in keeping with Heschel's understanding of the divine-human relationship as we shall see in Chapter Five, is to say that to come to the world in wonder is to be an actor in an expansive, sacred drama co-written and co-produced with a thespian God.

Yet, for Heschel, science is not the enemy against which religion wages war. Religion has no reason to be intimidated by science. Science and religion are dedicated to different tasks.

Science does not try to fathom the mystery. It merely describes and explains the way in which things behave in terms of causal necessity. It does not try to give us an explanation in terms of logical necessity—why things *must* be at all, and why the laws of nature *must* be the way they are.

... Trying to pierce the mystery with our categories is like trying to bite a wall. Science extends rather than limits the scope of the ineffable, and our radical amazement is enhanced rather than reduced by the advancement of knowledge. The theory of evolution and adaptation of the species does not disenchant the organism of its wonder.¹⁸⁴

Unlike scientific curiosity, which dispenses with wonder once a phenomenon is

¹⁸³Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 37.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 30.

explained, wonder is an ongoing attitude toward life. A response to the ineffable, it is a prelude to faith, and a necessary ingredient in being human. Whereas curiosity either ceases with the acceptance of a perceived fact or in the case of scientific curiosity “looks beyond individual facts to the laws they exemplify, . . . wonder . . . is an attitude which, far from being set at ease by a fact, takes it as a stimulus which points beyond what is immediately given.”¹⁸⁵ Heschel explains, “to the prophets wonder is *a form of thinking*. It is not the beginning of knowledge but an act that goes beyond knowledge; it does not come to an end when knowledge is acquired; it is an attitude that never ceases.”¹⁸⁶

To view wonder as a form of thinking that leads to a way of acting, is to understand it as the first unwitting, amorphous gestures of seeking God who is seeking humans clandestinely through the sublime. “To the Biblical man,” Heschel says, “the sublime is but a form in which the presence of God strikes forth.”¹⁸⁷ It elicits not passivity but the inarticulate human desire to rendezvous with the hidden in the apparent, to encounter the meaning beyond the mystery. Heschel points out that in the Bible there are several words that refer to the act of seeking God. Whereas some imply the act of asking a question in order to elicit information, in other passages “it means addressing oneself directly to God with the aim of getting close to Him; it involves a desire for experience rather than a search for information.”¹⁸⁸ Wonder signals that the deeper and more innate concern for humans than acquiring information, is being involved in a situation that evokes an inner experience and the discovery of meaning.

¹⁸⁵Rothschild, Between God and Man, 12.

¹⁸⁶Heschel, God in Search of Man, 46.

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 28.

Heschel contends, “There are three aspects of nature which command man’s attention: power, loveliness, grandeur. Power he exploits, loveliness he enjoys, grandeur fills him with awe.”¹⁸⁹ According to Heschel, “The Greeks learned in order to comprehend, the Hebrews learned in order to revere. The modern man learns in order to use.” Therefore, as with many of our dialogue partners reviewed in Chapter Two, Heschel laments that a spirit of utilitarian pragmatism and guileless presumption characterize the modern, technological age and diminish human dignity.¹⁹⁰ Not only is it a time in which the value of both humans and things are often measured by the utilization of their resources, but also one in which humans are overly confident in their ability “to explain all mystery away.”¹⁹¹ Here the ineffable or mystery is viewed as an unsolved puzzle, nothing more than a scientific category whose synonym is “the unknown or the nondescript.” From a scientific standpoint, mystery is something to be deciphered. From a religious perspective, mystery is neither something we produce nor something we resolve but something we sense and to which we give reply.

Heschel suggests that ours is a culture of expedience. Even religion, he maintains, is largely guided by self-interest and reconstructed to meet personal needs. As opposed to the way of expediency, which exploits the resources in order to seek its own gain, wonder presents another way “we go out to meet the world.”¹⁹² Heschel clarifies, “In the first we accumulate information in order to dominate; in the second we deepen our appreciation

¹⁸⁹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 3.

¹⁹⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 34.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

¹⁹²Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 36.

in order to respond.”¹⁹³ In contrast to the way of expediency which promotes manipulation and is self-serving, the way of wonder fosters appreciation and the offering of self.

Commitment to expediency, the nemesis of radical amazement, leads to alienation. Dedication to wonder leads to a sense of the interconnectedness of all life. Rather than standing between human beings and mystery shutting them out from it, the ineffable brings the two together. Wonder is one-der. Heschel writes:

To our knowledge the world and the “I” are two, an object and a subject; but *within* our wonder the world and the “I” are one in being, in eternity. We become alive to our living in the great fellowship of all being, we cease to regard things as opportunities to exploit.¹⁹⁴

Radical amazement is an awareness of the wonder of being that deepens our appreciation for the interweaving of all that is and that expands our ways of participating in the beyondness of reality, of entering into the deepest dimension of all existence inferred in the sublime.

Mystery

Intimately related to the sense of the ineffable quality of all reality, is the sense of mystery. To suggest that anything as inscrutable as the sublime and mystery could be demarcated easily would be misleading. They are not like autonomous, neighboring countries with distinct terrains and climates separated by a common but clearly defined border. The sublime and mystery are more like two watercolors on a canvas, distinguishable yet washing together so that it is difficult to notice where one ends and

¹⁹³Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Ibid, 38-39.

where the other begins. Together, in Heschel's anthropology, they form the initial "phase" in the development of human becoming in a movement that is not linear as much as it is spiral. In other words, although these two transcendent themes and their correlative responses are considered by Heschel to be "the substratum out of which belief arises,"¹⁹⁵ they are not merely the first stations that we pass like a train on a one-way track never to return to again. The sense of mystery and its evocations in people is not a fixed, unrepeatable stage in human becoming anymore than are the sense of the ineffable and its corresponding response of wonder. Rather, they are moments and events that present themselves repeatedly to humans prompting a response. Unlike a scientific theory where once it is announced and accepted it does not have to be repeated, wonder and awe must be constantly cultivated and lived, just as sublimity and mystery must be keenly looked for and attended to.¹⁹⁶ For the religious person, the divine approach disguised as the sublime and mystery is forever present and constantly inviting a response, whether in the pre-reflective, pre-theological moment of inwardness, or in the conscious, intentional act of worship by the person of deep faith. This having been said, when schematized, Heschel's anthropology is best understood as a movement born in radical amazement and culminating in prophetic sympathy.

By its nature, mystery must be described in paradoxical terms. That which is fundamentally an allusive reality can only be alluded to but is never fully captured in words. Mystery is "the mind-surpassing grandeur of reality" that alludes to the divine

¹⁹⁵Robert McAfee Brown, "'Some Are Guilty, All are Responsible': Heschel's Social Ethics," in Merkle, ed., Exploring His Life, 27.

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 37; Heschel, God in Search of Man, 49.

presence.¹⁹⁷ Efforts by Heschel to describe it invite seeming contradictions. It can be apprehended, but not comprehended. It is both concealed and revealed, “both known and unknown, plain and enigmatic, transparent and impenetrable.”¹⁹⁸ The opposite of fact is not fiction or invention, but mystery in the sense that fact refers to that which is and is verifiable, whereas mystery refers to that which is and is unfathomable. Empirical data verifies the former. Awe validates the latter. Heschel enunciates it this way:

The mystery and grandeur we face are overwhelmingly real. What they stand for is so sublime that it stuns our ability to adore it. The imperative of awe is its certificate of evidence, a universal certificate which we all seal with tremor and fascination, *not* because we desire to, but because we are stunned and cannot brave it. There is so much more meaning in reality than my soul can take in!¹⁹⁹

With mystery “we know and do not know—this is our condition.”²⁰⁰ However, Heschel points out that perhaps a truer sense of mystery is seen when in the Bible Job does not say, “We do not know,” but rather that God knows. Heschel continues:

What is known and concealed from us is known and open to God. This, then, is the specific meaning of mystery in our sense. It is not a *synonym for the unknown* but rather a name for a *meaning which stands in relation to God*.²⁰¹

“An ontological category,” Heschel contends that although “what [mystery] stands for is to most people most obviously given in the experience of exceptional events, . . . it is dimension of all existence and may be experienced everywhere and at all times.”²⁰² What it stands for is “the spiritual dimension of all being” that humans intuit

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 98.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 59.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 106; Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 63.

²⁰⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 59.

²⁰¹Ibid., 74.

²⁰²Ibid., 57.

but can never penetrate. Like the mystics, the deeper we search the more we know, and the more we know, the more we know that we do not know. As Heschel states,

“To our sense of mystery and wonder the world is too incredible, too meaningful for us, and its existence the most unlikely, the most unbelievable fact, contrary to all reasonable expectations.”²⁰³

Heschel claims there are three fundamental attitudes to the mystery of life: the fatalist, the positivist, and the biblical. To the fatalist, mystery represents the inscrutable, blind power that controls the world paying no attention to either justice or purpose. Because “a tragic doom is hanging over the world,” the only recourse is an attitude of resignation usually tinged with resentment. To the positivist, everything is ultimately explainable. Rather than being imbued with mysteriousness, the world contains no meaning beyond its obvious matter-of-factness. Therefore, mystery is reduced to the as-yet-unknown which one day will be explained (away).²⁰⁴ For Heschel, the prophet embodies the third attitude, the biblical. The prophet is the prototype of the biblical person who, looking and listening for traces of the divine, is aware of the divine presence in all reality. Humble and wise, the prophet has the ability to look at all things from the point of view of God.²⁰⁵ The prophet understands: “*To be* implies *to stand for*, because every being is representative of something that is more than itself; because the seen, the known, stands for the unseen, the unknown.”²⁰⁶ Elsewhere Heschel extends this idea:

Everything holds the great secret. For it is the inescapable situation of all being to be involved in the infinite mystery. We may continue to disregard the mystery,

²⁰³Ibid., 107.

²⁰⁴Ibid., 67-68.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 75.

²⁰⁶Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 31.

but we can neither deny nor escape it.²⁰⁷

Mystery is the divine double-entendre: on the one hand, it is a reference to the fact that all things exist *through* God, and, on the other hand, that *through* all things God can be sensed. Heschel writes:

What, then, is reality? To the Western man, it is a *thing in itself*; to the Biblical Man, it is a *thing through God*. Looking at a thing his eyes see not so much form, color, force and motion as an act of God. The world is a gate, not a wall.²⁰⁸

Heschel points out that “what the prophets sense in nature is not a direct reflection of God but an allusion to Him.”²⁰⁹ Thus, unlike nature-worshippers, prophets “do not deify the mystery; we worship Him who in His wisdom surpasses all mysteries.”²¹⁰ Heschel reiterates: “God is a mystery, but the mystery is not God. He is a *revealer of mysteries*.”²¹¹

For Heschel, the word mystery connotes the grandeur of life, the hidden meaning that resides within and behind it, and the awesomeness of God. “Thou canst not see My face, for man shall not see Me and live. Even the seraphim cover their faces with their wings in the presence of God” (Is. 6:2)²¹² But it is equally important to understand that mystery alludes to the mercy of God and not just the otherness of God, for it is in and through that which can be perceived that the unperceivable is first made known. Mystery, in other words, is an avenue by which humans can approach the divine and it is in and

²⁰⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 57-58.

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 97-98.

²⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 97.

²¹⁰*Ibid.*, 66.

²¹¹*Ibid.*

²¹²*Ibid.*, 62. Scripture translation is by Heschel.

through the mysterious nature of reality that God conveys the gracious willingness to be approached.²¹³

The awareness which opens our minds to the existence of a supreme being is an awareness of reality, an awareness of a divine presence. Long before we attain any knowledge about His *essence*, we possess an intuition of a divine *presence*.²¹⁴

The fire's smoke, mystery signals an ultimate source. A sense of mystery infers that everything is connected to God, that all creation, and all creatures are related and refer to the Creator. Mystery is the divine indicativeness that dwells within everything and everyone.²¹⁵ It does not refer to "any particular esoteric quality that may be revealed to the initiated, but the essential nature of being as being, the nature of being as God's creation out of nothing."²¹⁶ The hidden in the apparent, the enigma in the evident, and the imperceptible in the perceptible are hints of the holy and intimations of the holy dimension of existence. Mystery suggests the inscrutable enigma that is God. To be aware of the presence of mystery in the world, to be aware of and appreciate the mysteriousness of being itself, is to begin to sense both the incomprehensible nature of God and the relatedness of everything to God. This realization imbues life with transcendent meaning. Heschel says it this way:

The heavens declare the glory of God. Man is confronted with a world that alludes to something beyond itself, to a truth beyond experience. It is the allusiveness to a meaning which is not of this world, and it is that allusiveness which conveys to us the awareness of a spiritual dimension of reality, the relatedness of being to transcendent meaning.²¹⁷

²¹³Ibid., 129.

²¹⁴Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 67.

²¹⁵Heschel, God in Search of Man, 97.

²¹⁶Ibid., 57.

²¹⁷Ibid., 108.

By “the relatedness of being to transcendent meaning” Heschel specifically has in mind the conviction that “all reality is involved in the will and thought of God,” especially human persons who are able to be aware of the presence of mystery and of their involvement in it and intentionally respond to it by seeking its source.²¹⁸

Heschel stresses that, for the Jew, mystery and the awareness of mystery are essential and necessary dimensions of religious consciousness. He states:

Sensitivity to the mystery of living is the essence of human dignity. It is the soil in which our consciousness has its roots, and out of which a sense of meaning is derived. Man does not live by explanations alone, but by the sense of wonder and mystery. Without it there is neither religion nor morality, neither sacrifice nor creativity.²¹⁹

Heschel maintains that the difference between an ontological approach to the human person and a biblical approach is that the former accepts being as the ultimate value whereas the latter stresses human living as the ultimately real. Biblical thinking, he emphasizes, “seeks to relate man to divine living, to a transcendence called the living God.”²²⁰ Since “the grandeur of nature is only the beginning,” and because “*beyond the grandeur is God*,” Heschel asserts not only that the world but also that God is a mystery who is “a question, not an answer.”²²¹ As we will see, the appropriate answer is awe, reverence and worship.²²²

²¹⁸*Ibid.*, 73.

²¹⁹Heschel, “Depth Theology,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 123-24.

²²⁰Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 69.

²²¹*Ibid.*, 97.

²²²Merkle, *Genesis of Faith*, 166.

Awe

In Heschel's construction, as mystery is to the sublime, so awe is to wonder. What wonder is to the sublime, awe is to mystery. Just as wonder is the appropriate response to the sublime, so too awe is the fitting response to mystery. John Merkle, the respected interpreter of Rabbi Heschel's work, points out that although Heschel does not state it explicitly, there are two discernable expressions of awe in his writings: awe as a *response to mystery*, and awe as a *response to God*. The two forms of awe correspond to the two forms of mystery referred to above: first, the mystery of being itself, and the mysteriousness of and in the world, and second, the mystery of God, the God whose presence can be sensed and experienced but whose essence is forever a secret. Whereas awe before God necessarily includes awe before mystery, awe in response to mystery does not require awe in response to God. However, as we will see, awe as a response to mystery is often a prelude and a pathway to awe as a response to God.²²³

People often translate and conceive of awe as fear. Heschel clarifies that in the Hebrew Bible, the word *yirah* has two meanings: fear and awe. The former, he maintains is considered inferior in Jewish tradition. The latter, he says, is "the principle religious virtue," according to the Bible.²²⁴ Diametrically opposed to hope, fear is "the anticipation and expectation of evil or pain," whereas awe is "the sense of wonder and humility inspired by the sublime or felt in the presence of mystery."²²⁵ Before an awe-inspiring object, fear causes us to shrink whereas awe "draws us near to it."²²⁶ This idea of awe is

²²³Ibid.

²²⁴Heschel, God in Search of Man, 77.

²²⁵Ibid.

²²⁶Ibid.

similar to Rudolph Otto's famous description of the numinous as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, that mystery which is awesome and tremendous, yet fascinating and alluring.²²⁷

It is this latter sense of enchantment that makes awe compatible with love and joy, but the antithesis of fear. By way of example, Heschel points out that when Job said of God, "Though He may slay me, yet I will trust in Him," he was motivated by awe not fear, by which Heschel means "the realization of the grandeur of His eternal love."²²⁸ Given Heschel's ancestral inheritance of Hasidism and his early years steeped in Torah and Talmud, it is not surprising that he places so great an emphasis on awe. So significant is awe that Heschel claims it, not faith, is "the cardinal attitude of the religious Jew."²²⁹ Awe, not belief, is the more compatible biblical synonym for religion. In Judaism, the person of faith is not so much a believer, as a *yare hashem*, one who is in awe of God.²³⁰

Heschel contends, "The greatest insights happen to us in moments of awe," indicating that awe is intimately and inevitably related to wisdom. Wisdom, of course, is not knowledge understood as the accumulation of information, nor is it "an uncommon degree of common sense" or the result of shrewdness.²³¹ Heschel makes clear that ultimate wisdom like ultimate meaning resides in God, not in the world. The only way to wisdom is through a relationship with God. "That relationship," Heschel explains, "is

²²⁷Rudolph Otto, The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923, 1950), 12, 35

²²⁸Heschel, God in Search of Man, 77.

²²⁹*Ibid.*

²³⁰*Ibid.*

²³¹*Ibid.*, 75, 78.

awe.”²³² True wisdom is the “participation in the wisdom of God.” In particular, as mentioned above, “Wisdom is the ability to look at all things from the point of view of God” which among other things means to hold all objects, animate or inanimate, in relationship to the Creator. Although a bit overstated, Heschel makes his point clear when he makes this distinction:

There seem to be two courses of human thinking: one begins with man and his needs and ends in assuming that the universe is a meaningless display or a waste of energy; the other begins in amazement, in awe and humility and ends in the assumption that the universe is full of glory that surpasses man and his mind, but is of eternal meaning to Him who made being possible.²³³

“The secret of every being,” Heschel asserts, “is the divine care and concern that are invested in it. Something sacred is at stake in every event.”²³⁴ Whereas wonder is the beginning of awe, awe is the beginning of wisdom. It refers to the human person’s unique and conscious rapport with the mystery of all reality.²³⁵

As such, awe is not an emotion or an affect but rather “an answer of the heart and mind to the presence of mystery in all things,” a relationship with life in which, beholding what is, one senses the presence of something more.²³⁶ “Awe,” says Heschel, “is itself an act of insight into a meaning greater than ourselves.”²³⁷ In Who is Man? Heschel writes:

Awe is an intuition for the dignity of all things, a realization that things

²³²Ibid., 74.

²³³Ibid., 105.

²³⁴Ibid., 75, 74.

²³⁵Ibid., 74.

²³⁶Ibid., 106.

²³⁷Ibid., 74.

not only are what they are but also stand, however remotely, for something supreme. Awe is a sense for the transcendence, for the reference everywhere to mystery beyond all things. It enables us to perceive in the world intuitions of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple; to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal. What we cannot comprehend by analysis, we become aware of in awe.²³⁸

As Heschel makes clear in a slightly reworded passage in God in Search of Man, transcendence more specifically means “the reference everywhere to *Him* who is beyond all things.”²³⁹ About this Heschel says, “The soul is introduced to a reality which is not only *other* than itself, as it is the case in the ordinary acts of perception; it is introduced to a reality which is *higher* than the universe.”²⁴⁰ If by a sense of the sublime we mean an awareness of the spiritual suggestiveness of all reality, a hint of the preciousness of being and the transcendent meaning that makes that being precious, then a sense of mystery is the first insight or intuition that the transcendent meaning is a divine presence. Heschel states:

True, the mystery of meaning is silent. There is no speech, there are no words, the voice is not heard. Yet beyond our reasoning and beyond our believing, there is a *preconceptual* faculty that senses the glory, the presence of the Divine. We do not perceive it. We have no knowledge; we only have an awareness. We witness it.²⁴¹

Moreso, a sense of mystery not only suggests a meaning beyond the mystery, but also a mercy beyond the meaning. Awe is the reverent suspicion that the meaning is merciful, and since mercy is not a free-floating virtue but necessarily presumes one who is merciful, we can say that awe is the inauguration of religion, the antecedent of faith, and

²³⁸Heschel, Who Is Man?, 88-89.

²³⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 75. Italics are mine.

²⁴⁰Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 65.

²⁴¹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 108.

the seed of worship.

Reverence

Nearly synonymous with awe in Heschel's writings is the attitude of reverence. In a chapter titled, "To Be is to Stand For," he describes reverence as "one of man's answers to the presence of mystery."²⁴² His description of it contributes to our understanding of awe, and the human response to mystery. Underscoring that it is characteristic of humans in all civilizations, he maintains, "Reverence is an attitude as indigenous to human consciousness as fear when facing danger or pain when hurt."²⁴³ This is similar to his conviction: "No one is without a sense of awe."²⁴⁴

On the one hand, Heschel maintains that awe and reverence are native to human being, a given capacity. On the other hand, he makes it clear that awe and reverence are conscious acts, not just a capability but an ability to be developed and enacted. If through presumption and callousness we ignore the mystery, then awe atrophies and reverence fades away.

Forfeit your sense of awe, let your conceit diminish your ability to revere, and the universe becomes a market place for you. The loss of awe is the great block to insight. A return to reverence is the first prerequisite for a revival of wisdom, for the discovery of the world as an allusion to God.²⁴⁵

It is in this sense that Heschel speaks of reverence and awe as being a *categorical imperative*.²⁴⁶ This means, first, the experience of awe is intrinsic to human being and

²⁴²Ibid., 26.

²⁴³Ibid., 25.

²⁴⁴Heschel, God in Search of Man, 88.

²⁴⁵Ibid., 78.

²⁴⁶Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 27.

internally enforced “as if there were an *imperative*, a compulsion to pay attention to that which lies beyond our grasp.”²⁴⁷ He insists, “No one who is unprejudiced is able in the presence of grandeur to declare that such reverence is fatuous or absurd.”²⁴⁸ He writes:

Confined in our own study rooms, we may entertain any idea that comes to our minds. Under such circumstances it is even plausible to say that the world is worthless and all meaning a dream or fiction. And yet, no one can sneer at the stars, mock the dawn, ridicule the outburst of the spring, or scoff at the totality of being. Away from the immense, cloistered in our own concepts, we may scorn and revile everything. But standing between heaven and earth, we are silenced.²⁴⁹

For Heschel, it is not the “feeling of awe” that is the certificate of evidence of its validity but rather “the intellectual certainty that in the face of nature’s grandeur and mystery we must respond with awe.”²⁵⁰ Human being comes with the capacity for awe and reverence. Second, to say that awe is a categorical imperative means that it is necessary for coming-into-being, for being or becoming human. What is indigenous and inherent to human being, unless cultivated and consciously cared for, will lie fallow. Persons can ignore or attend to what is innate in the human spirit. Being human comes with the expectation of awe and reverence and requires satisfying that expectation. “All that is left to us is a choice—to answer or to refuse to answer.”²⁵¹

Another dimension of reverence that is illuminating is that it is never self-directed. “Reverence is always for someone else; there is no self-reverence,” maintains Heschel. In addition, ignorance is never the cause of reverence. He points out, “We have

²⁴⁷Ibid., 4.

²⁴⁸Ibid., 25.

²⁴⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 105-06.

²⁵⁰Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 27.

²⁵¹Ibid., 69.

no feelings of awe for the other side of the moon or for that which will happen tomorrow.”²⁵² Again, it is not the unfamiliarity of something that elicits reverence, but rather the hidden in the apparent. Conversely, he states, “Nor do we ever revere the known; because the known is in our grasp, and we revere only that which surpasses us. . . . It is the *extremely precious*, morally, intellectually, or spiritually that we revere.”²⁵³ Finally, he says:

Reverence . . . is a salute of the soul; an awareness of value without enjoyment of that value, or seeking any personal advantage from it. There is a unique kind of transparence about things and events. The world is seen through, and no veil can conceal God completely. So the pious man is ever alert to see behind the appearance of things a trace of the divine, and thus his attitude toward life is one of expectant reverence.²⁵⁴

It is apparent from the above discussion, how central, for Heschel, radical amazement is to thinking and living religiously. But “to live within the core,”²⁵⁵ as Heschel calls it, requires more than wonder, awe and reverence. It demands following the trail of the sublime, wonder, mystery, awe, and reverence back to the ultimate question concealed in the realm of the ineffable and radical amazement.

The Experience of Being Asked

So central are wonder and awe to Heschel’s “sacred humanism” that not to sense the sublime mystery of life is, for him, to be less than human.²⁵⁶ Yet, however indispensable radical amazement is for Heschel, it is not enough to insure being human. It

²⁵²Ibid., 26.

²⁵³Ibid.

²⁵⁴Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 286.

²⁵⁵Ibid., 16.

²⁵⁶Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 3.

is not the ultimate answer, final destination, or universal panacea. On the contrary, Heschel explains,

Wonder is not a state of esthetic enjoyment. Endless wonder is endless tension, a situation in which we are shocked at the inadequacy of our awe, at the weakness of our shock, as well as the state of being asked the ultimate question. . . Wonder is the state of our being asked. The ineffable is a question addressed to us.²⁵⁷

What makes the sublime mystery so significant for human living is its allusiveness. What makes wonder and awe so important is their own allusive quality. They insinuate that a requiredness comes with human being and gives meaning to human living. Heschel asserts:

A person is he of whom demands can be made, who has the capacity to respond to what is required, not only to satisfy his own needs and desires. Only a human being is said to be responsible. Responsibility is not something man imputes to himself; he is a self by virtue of his capacity for responsibility, and he would cease to be a self if he were to be deprived of responsibility.²⁵⁸

To be human involves the awareness that the ineffable and mystery and the subsequent replies of wonder and awe signal that meaning is in search of humanity. To be religious is to realize that something is required of us and to dare to be accountable to this realization. Contrasting the Biblical way of thinking with the way of Greek philosophy, which inserts values where Jews place God, Heschel points out that whereas Plato has Socrates ask, "What is good?" Moses' question was, "What does God require of thee?"²⁵⁹

Philosophy begins with the human question, argues Heschel, but "religion begins with God's question and man's answer."²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷Ibid., 69.

²⁵⁸Heschel, Who Is Man?, 106.

²⁵⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 98.

²⁶⁰Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 76.

For Heschel, “religion consists of *God’s question and man’s answer*. ”²⁶¹ Persons discover the essential questions of human living by being open to the realm of the ineffable and radical amazement. As mentioned above, according to Heschel, wonder leads to awe. Awe, as a response to mystery, is the antecedent of wisdom and faith. Although it is a vital expression and constitutive dimension of mature faith, Heschel stresses that originally it is the preconceptual situation, the pretheological experience, and the presymbolic soil in which faith is but an invisible seedling. Since the sublime and the ineffable are not other names for the divine, awe is the beginning of the beginning of faith. Heschel states:

The beginning of faith is . . . not a feeling for the mystery of living or a sense of awe, wonder and amazement. The root of religion is the question what to do with the feeling for the mystery of living, what to do with awe, wonder and amazement. Religion begins with a consciousness that something is asked of us. It is in that tense, eternal asking in which the soul is caught and which man’s answer is elicited.²⁶²

I spoke of awe leading to wisdom. Wisdom involves the realization that to be human is to be called upon to answer. Heschel contends, “The most significant intellectual act is to decide what the most fundamental question is to live by.”²⁶³ He instructs, the realm of the ineffable not speculation is the climate in which the ultimate question comes into being and it is in its natural habitat where mystery is within reach of all thoughts, that the question must be studied. This is because the ultimate question is not an academic problem.²⁶⁴ It is ultimate because it is a question of depth, of soul. “The

²⁶¹Ibid., 137.

²⁶²Ibid., 162; Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 68-69.

²⁶³Heschel, Who Is Man?, 107.

²⁶⁴Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 69.

mind does not know how to phrase it, yet the soul sighs it, sings it, pleads it."²⁶⁵ Heschel states:

We owe our question not to something less but to something which is more than the known. We ask because the world is too much for us, because the known is crammed with marvel, because the world is replete with what is more than the world as we understand it.²⁶⁶

The ultimate question is neither an academic question nor one that can be phrased in categories of reason. It is discovered in the realm of the ineffable, in the situation of living or it is not found at all. In fact, according to Heschel, the contemporary problem is that "the climate in which we live today is not congenial to the continued growth of questions which have taken centuries to cultivate. The Bible is an answer to the supreme question: *what does God demand of us?* Yet the question has gone out of the world."²⁶⁷

The ultimate question is not a single, literal question, but rather the transposition into real, concrete situations of human living the supreme question stated immediately above.

Heschel's personal mission (and therefore the task of a pastoral care inspired by his vision and work) is to bring the essential though forgotten questions back into the world. His intent, and he believes, the proper role of religion is to reintroduce persons to elemental human situations that give rise to the essential human questions to which religion is the answer. This, as we shall see later, is one of the fundamental roles of pastoral theology and care as well. Stated variously throughout Heschel's works the question is: "How should a being created in the likeness of God act, think, feel? How

²⁶⁵Ibid., 61.

²⁶⁶Ibid.

²⁶⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 168.

should we live in a way which is compatible with our being a likeness of God?"²⁶⁸ "What is expected of me? What is demanded of me?"²⁶⁹ "How should I live the life that I am?"²⁷⁰ "In the language of the Bible: 'What is required of me?'"²⁷¹ "What is being human?"²⁷² "What way of living is compatible with the grandeur and mystery of life?"²⁷³ Heschel states:

To the speculative mind, the world is an enigma; to the religious mind, the world is a challenge. The speculative problem is impersonal; the religious problem is a problem addressed to the person. The first is concerned with finding an answer to the question: what is the cause of being? The second, with giving an answer to the question: what is asked of us?²⁷⁴

The speculative question is a question *about* God. The religious question is a question *from* God. "Unlike questions of science which we may if we wish leave to others, the ultimate question gives us no rest. Every one of us is called upon to answer."²⁷⁵ Heschel maintains that "the most important experience in the life of every human being" is that something is asked of us.²⁷⁶ This awareness is the birth of religion. To repress, disregard, or not understand what is being asked of us is the cause of anxiety.

Heschel insists "it is in . . . being challenged that man discovers himself as a

²⁶⁸Heschel, "Idols in the Temples," in Insecurity of Freedom, 59.

²⁶⁹Heschel, Who Is Man?, 108.

²⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 36.

²⁷¹*Ibid.*, 107.

²⁷²*Ibid.*, 29.

²⁷³Heschel, God in Search of Man, 283.

²⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 111.

²⁷⁵*Ibid.*

²⁷⁶Heschel, Who Is Man?, 108.

human being.”²⁷⁷ So strongly does Heschel feel about this that he responds to the question, “Do I exist as a human being?” with the answer: “*I am commanded—therefore I am.*” He understands the human person especially as a commanded being. This is indispensable to becoming human. It ennobles rather than diminishes humanity. He contends:

The loss of the sense of significant being is due to the loss of the commandment of being. Being is obedience, a response. “Thou art” precedes “I am.” I am because I am called upon to be.²⁷⁸

To reiterate, as important as wonder, awe, and reverence are, they are secondary to the more essential question: *what to do* with the feeling for the mystery of living, what do we do with wonder, awe, and reverence? Heschel remarks:

The sense of the wonder, awe, and mystery does not give us a knowledge of God. It only leads to a plane where the question about God becomes an inescapable concern, to a situation in which we discover that we can neither place our anxiety in the safe deposit of opinions nor delegate to others the urgent task of answering the ultimate question.²⁷⁹

The sense of the ineffable, the awareness of mystery, and the ensuing responses of wonder, awe, and reverence form the first syllable of humanity’s “Amen” which is always forming and eternally rising from within, yet ultimately too deep for words. It is this constellation of divine overtures and human responses that form the real situation and the sacred realm where humans are summoned to hear and heed the demands and ultimate questions of existence. Here begins the “acceptance of meaning, obedience, and commitment.”²⁸⁰ The suggestiveness of the sublime mystery that evokes radical

²⁷⁷Ibid., 111.

²⁷⁸Ibid., 98.

²⁷⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 118-19; Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 68.

²⁸⁰Heschel, Who Is Man?, 98.

amazement gives way to the question and challenge inherent in wonder and awe: to *whom* do we owe an answer and what is expected of me? We turn now to the source of that spiritual suggestiveness, to the divine glory, and its human counterpart, faith.

CHAPTER 5

DIVINE GLORY AND THE HUMAN RESPONSE

As mentioned earlier, Heschel's theological construction defies facile, rigid schematization. To assume that such qualities as sublimity, mystery, wonder, or awe could be cleanly demarcated is not only to apply scientific means to measure transcendent and profound realities, but also to miss the nuance inherent in Heschel's "poetics of piety"¹ and the reverent humility with which he treats these deep dimensions of human experience. Thus, we keep in mind the words of one Heschel interpreter, Byron Sherwin, who writes:

A feature of scientific thinking and of Western philosophical tradition is the impetus to define everything, to compartmentalize experience. For Heschel, however, the central terms which epitomize religious thinking elude concise definitions. God cannot be defined, but only experienced. The "concept of God" is of penultimate importance; the presence of God is of ultimate significance. For Heschel, the religious quest begins not with definitions, but with the awareness of the ineffable. That which transcends comprehension, that which definitions cannot contain, is at the root of the religious consciousness. . . .

Thus for Heschel, concepts, definitions, and words are not "the last word"; rather, they are windows through which we may approach him who transcends both worlds and words.²

The purpose of systematizing Rabbi Heschel's writings is to make more explicit the inherent flow and unity of his thought and thus to gain a fuller understanding of his work.

¹Kaplan, Holiness in Words, 3.

²Sherwin, Abraham Joshua Heschel, 16.

The intention is to do so without violating the poetic spirit, passionate expression, and essence of his spiritual vision.³

It is with this in mind that we continue our study of Heschel's work. The movement from the allusiveness of sublime mystery to the felt requiredness of radical amazement not only points us toward the antecedents of faith—humility, indebtedness, gratefulness, and praise—but also directs us toward the divine glory present in the world, and its corresponding response, faith, and from there toward one of faith's primary expressions, prayer. These themes are the focus of this chapter.

Glory As Presence

Heschel stresses that as magnificent and evocative as the ineffable and mystery are, they are not the ultimate reality of human existence but only allude to the ultimate reality who is God.⁴ He points out that in the Bible, the word *glory* indicates that beyond the ineffable is presence. The glory of God is the presence of God. In later times, this presence is frequently called the *Shekinah*.⁵ Throughout the scriptures, the glory of God “is proclaimed not as a messianic promise but as a fact.”⁶ Although typically disguised, there are moments, when the glory is disclosed, in particular to the prophets. The seraphim reveal to Isaiah: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; *the whole earth is full of His glory*” (6:3) Ezekiel sees the glory of God. (Ez. 3:12, 43:2) The psalmist sings, “*The*

³In his book, Holiness in Words, Edward Kaplan argues that Heschel's work is a masterful linguistic theory and practice in which poetic language, in combination with conceptual and discursive thinking, is an intentional and intricate rhetorical art in the service of spirit.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Heschel, God in Search of Man, 81.

⁶Ibid., 80.

heavens are telling the glory of God." (19:1) On more than one occasion during the wilderness sojourn, "the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people." (Leviticus 9:23; Numbers 16:19, 17:7, 20:6) The Book of Deuteronomy acknowledges, "The Lord our God has shown us His glory."⁷

The divine glory is sensed in and through the world. In the biblical testimony, the divine glory is often signaled by cloud, fire, storm, or lightning. Heschel stresses that these sublime phenomenon provide a "setting for the glory; [they are] not the glory itself."⁸ Franklin Sherman succinctly captures this distinction when he says, "creation as such is the theater of God's glory."⁹ Again, Heschel makes it clear, first, that Judaism does not confuse the sublime mystery of nature, the grandeur of the universe, the magnificence of the star-studded night sky, for the divine glory. Judaism renounces pantheism, while celebrating and valuing creation. Therefore, instead of being an object of our worship, Heschel emphasizes:

To the Biblical man, the beauty of the world issued from the grandeur of God; His majesty towered beyond the breathtaking mystery of the universe. Rather than being crushed by the mystery, he was inspired to praise the majesty. And rather than praise the world for its beauty, he called upon the world to praise its Creator.¹⁰

For Heschel, "the earth is our sister, not our mother."¹¹ As such, it joins humans "in a

⁷Ibid., 80-81.

⁸Ibid., 81.

⁹Sherman, Promise of Heschel, 30.

¹⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 95-96.

¹¹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 118.

fellowship of praise.”¹² Consequently, “the adoration of nature is as absurd as the alienation from nature is unnecessary.”¹³ His concern is that we not become so enamored with the beauty and power of nature that we mistake it for the ultimate, that we confuse the gift for the giver, and adore that which is unworthy of our adoration.

The Bible asserts that for all her power and preciousness, beauty and grandeur, nature is not everything. It calls upon us to remember that what is given is not the ultimate. It calls upon us not to let the world stand as a wall between us and God. . . . the Biblical mind is deeply aware that the ultimate, God, is beyond the given. What is given is not ultimate but created by Him Who is not given. Nowhere in the Bible is the reality of the universe questioned, but at the same time a certainty prevails that for all its greatness the universe is as nothing compared to its Maker.¹⁴

Heschel refers to this position as the “desanctification of nature.”¹⁵ By desanctification he means not that nature is not sacred but rather that it is not *the* Sacred, that its sacredness and grandeur are necessarily derivative, created, and, therefore never worthy of our supreme worship.

Second, nature must be understood and can be understood only in relation to God. Heschel appreciates the beauty of the universe and sees it as a window through which humans are able to sense the glory of God.¹⁶ Yet, whereas the presence of God is sensed in and through the world, the world itself is only a thing *in and through God*.¹⁷ To

¹²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 91.

¹³Ibid., 90.

¹⁴Ibid., 91.

¹⁵Ibid., 90.

¹⁶Ibid., 91.

¹⁷Ibid., 97.

presume otherwise is to fall victim to “the fallacy of isolation.”¹⁸ Third, Heschel makes clear, nature is not “a direct reflection of God but an allusion to Him.”¹⁹ As stated earlier, “God is a mystery, but the mystery is not God.”²⁰ Fourth, in response to any attempt to conceive of nature apart from the will of God, Heschel stresses that in addition to the divine glory being sensed in and through creation, the glory is experienced *in contrast* to nature as well. Merkle points out that these two statements insure that the glory is neither confused for *a part of* nature nor posited as existing *apart from* nature.²¹

Heschel emphasizes, “The world is not an ontological necessity.”²² This means that the sublime mystery of nature and life is not an accident but rather fully intentional. That the world is at all and that creation is an allusion to God is not inevitable. Creation is “an act of the freedom of God.”²³ It is the free, generous, imaginative result of God’s will. As such, it engenders in the pious person embarrassment, indebtedness, and praise.

Heschel states:

The most commanding idea that Judaism dares to think is that freedom, not necessity, is the source of all being. The universe was not caused, but created. Behind mind and matter, order and relations, the freedom of God obtains.²⁴

This infers the divine desire to be in relationship. Creation, both the creative act and the result of that original event, is for the purpose of relationship. Creation points back to a

¹⁸Ibid., 95.

¹⁹Ibid., 97.

²⁰Ibid., 66.

²¹Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 179-80.

²²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 93.

²³Ibid., 16.

²⁴Heschel, “Religion in a Free Society,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 13.

creator. As stated earlier, sublimity and mystery are the preludes to divine glory, and divine glory as the presence of God is for the purpose of relationship. Writes Heschel:

The Bible tells us nothing about God in Himself; all its sayings refer to His relations to man. His own life and essence are neither told nor disclosed. We hear of no reflexive concern, of no passions, except a passion for justice. The only events in the life of God the Bible knows of are acts done for the sake of man: acts of creation, acts of compassion, acts of redemption (from Ur, from Egypt, from Babylon), or acts of revelation.²⁵

In addition to insuring that we do not confuse the “setting for the glory,” the situation for the reality itself, Heschel makes clear that the glory does not refer to the essence or the existence of God but to the presence of God. For example, the prophets do not claim to know God’s essence but do speak of God’s presence, that is, “of the forms of his relatedness to the world.”²⁶ Heschel clarifies:

Ontologically, the distinction between being and expression is rooted in the distinction between essence and relation. The theme of prophetic understanding is not the mystery of God’s essence, but rather the mystery of His relation to man. The prophet does not speculate about God in Himself; in thinking about Him, the world is always present. . . . What the prophet knows about God is His pathos, His relation to Israel and mankind.²⁷

For Heschel, the Bible is a written compendium of events recalling these forms of God’s relatedness to the world, and the prophet is the epitome of the biblical person who experiences the presence of God. However, by presence he does not mean a physical phenomenon.

The glory . . . is an act rather than a quality; a process not a substance. Mainly the glory manifests itself as a power overwhelming the world. Demanding homage, it is a power that descends to guide, to remind. The glory reflects abundance of

²⁵Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 144.

²⁶Sherman, Promise of Heschel, 36-37.

²⁷Heschel, Prophets, 620-21.

good and truth, the power that acts in nature and history.²⁸

The glory is not a thing. Rather, “it is equated with the goodness of God.”²⁹ When the seraphim announce “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts” it indicates the transcendence and beyondness of God. When they proclaim that *the whole earth is full of His glory*, it signals the immanence of God. “It means the whole earth is full of His presence,” that is, filled with, bathed in, and embraced by God’s goodness.³⁰ What the grandeur of nature hints at is the divine glory, and what the glory signals is the superfluous benevolence of God. Heschel remarks, “Beauty and grandeur are not anonymous; they are outbursts of God’s kindness.”³¹ In order not to reify God’s glory, Heschel makes it clear:

The glory is neither an esthetic nor a physical category. It is sensed in grandeur, but it is more than grandeur. It is, as we said, a living presence or *the effulgence of a living presence*.³²

Making note of how difficult it is to define what we mean in human experience by a person “having presence,” Heschel suggests it means that a person’s “outwardness communicates something of his indwelling power or greatness,” that “his soul is radiant and conveys itself without words.”³³ Analogously, Heschel explains, “The outwardness of the world communicates something of the indwelling greatness of God, which is radiant and conveys itself without words.”³⁴ The glory or presence of God conjures an image of

²⁸Heschel, God in Search of Man, 82.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Heschel, Prophets, 270.

³²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 83.

³³Ibid., 82-83.

³⁴Ibid., 83.

light shining forth from its source. The effulgent splendor of the light is apparent and real, but because the radiance is so brilliant, the source of the light is concealed. Using another image, Heschel makes the same point:

The impenetrable fog in which the world is clad is God's disguise. To know God means to sense display in His disguise and to be aware of the disguise in His most magnificent display.

God is within the world, present and concealed in the essence of things. If not for His presence, there would be no essence; if not for His concealment, there would be no appearance.³⁵

Again, Heschel's understanding of polarity comes into play. Even though Heschel maintains that in *essence* God is beyond all dichotomies, that all polarities and tensions are held as one in God, the *expression* of God as known and sensed in human experience involves the dialectic of polar opposites.³⁶ Here Heschel makes use of the sefirotic structure and the Lurianic concept of *tzimtzum* to illuminate the concrete experience whereby God is "concealed and yet present."³⁷ The nature of God's glory means that it is revealed and concealed, sensed but hidden, present yet absent, apprehended but not fully comprehended.

Divine Presence and Subjectivity

But if this is the case, Heschel asks, then "how can we ever reach an understanding of Him who is beyond mystery? How do we go from the intimations of the divine to a sense for the realness of God?"³⁸ How do persons know that the presence they

³⁵Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 149.

³⁶Heschel, "Confusion of Good and Evil," in Insecurity of Freedom, 136.

³⁷Rothschild, Between God and Man, 22.

³⁸Heschel, God in Search of Man, 114.

sense is the presence of God? Heschel's answer to this question: "Certainty of the realness of God comes about *As (sic) a response* of the whole person to the mystery and transcendence of living."³⁹ That is to say, *in* the response of the whole person, by *entering into* and being *involved* in the mystery, we come to know ourselves as subjectively known and cared for by a personal Being. This "response of the whole person" is called faith.⁴⁰

Heschel maintains that unlike science, which boasts of working in impersonal neutrality, theology necessarily involves situational thinking. Ultimate questions, questions of human meaning and transcendent living, must be raised not in a sterile laboratory but in their native environment. He states:

We must . . . not deal with the ultimate question, apart from the situation in which it exists, apart from the insights in which it is evoked and in which it is involved.⁴¹

About this he comments further:

There are two types of thinking; one that deals with *concepts* and one that deals with *situations*. . . Conceptual thinking is an act of reasoning; situational thinking involves an inner experience. . . Conceptual thinking is adequate when we are engaged in an effort to enhance our knowledge about the world. Situational thinking is necessary when we are engaged in an effort to understand issues on which we stake our very existence. . .

The attitude of the conceptual thinker is one of detachment: the subject facing an independent object; the attitude of the situational thinker is one of concern: the subject realizing that he is involved in a situation that is in need of understanding.⁴²

Later in the same text, he picks up this argument:

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰This is what Charles Davis has in mind by "religious feeling." See Chapter 1, note 34.

⁴¹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 130.

⁴²Ibid., 5.

Unlike scientific thinking, understanding for the realness of God does not come about by way of syllogism, by a series of abstractions, by a thinking that proceeds from concept to concept, but by way of insights. The ultimate insight is the outcome of *moments* when we are stirred beyond words, of instants of wonder, awe, praise, fear, trembling and radical amazement; of awareness of grandeur, of perceptions we can grasp but are unable to convey, of discoveries of the unknown, of moments in which we abandon the pretense of being acquainted with the world, of *knowledge by inacquaintance*. It is at the climax of such moments that we attain the certainty that life has meaning, that time is more than evanescence, that beyond all being there is someone who cares.⁴³

According to Heschel, it is in these inner experiences, in these preconceptual, presymbolic moments of depth where the totality of our being is involved, not in experiments of objective analysis or philosophical computations, that we sense not only the mystery but the divine presence in and beyond the mystery. Therefore, for Heschel, the realness of God is "*an ontological presupposition*" in which "to say 'God is' means less than what our immediate awareness contains. *The statement 'God is' is an understatement.*"⁴⁴ In a statement representative of his depth theology, Heschel says:

Proofs for the existence of God may add strength to our belief; they do not generate it. Human existence implies the realness of God. There is a certainty without knowledge in the depth of our being that accounts for our asking the ultimate question, a preconceptual certainty lies beyond all formulation or verbalization. . .

The certainty of the realness of God does not come about as a corollary of logical premises, as a leap from the realm of logic to the realm of ontology, from an assumption to a fact. It is, on the contrary, a transition from an immediate apprehension to a thought, from a preconceptual awareness to a definite assurance, from being overwhelmed by the presence of God to an awareness of His existence. What we attempt to do in the act of reflection is to raise that preconceptual awareness to the level of understanding.

In sensing the spiritual dimension of all being, we become aware of the absolute reality of the divine.⁴⁵

⁴³Ibid., 131.

⁴⁴Ibid., 121.

⁴⁵Ibid., 120-21.

In depth theology, Heschel is interested in exploring “the innerness of religion,” those rare moments of insight, moments of identification and penetration, original inner experiences of transcendent meaning and the realness of God that despite their authenticity defy easy formulation and expression. Thus, for Heschel, our belief in the reality of God (faith), is not an after-thought (“first possessing an idea and then postulating the ontal counterpart of it”); our thought (theology) is an “after-belief.”⁴⁶ Heschel claims, “The ultimate or God comes first and our reasoning about Him second.”⁴⁷

For Heschel, there really are no proofs for God, only situations and witnesses. He declares:

It takes three things to attain a sense of significant being:

God

A Soul

And a Moment.

And the three are always there.⁴⁸

More importantly, it is in such Moments, he alleges, that we sense the presence as being personal, as being “someone who cares.” Suggesting that the outstanding feature of a human being is to transcend oneself and “to have a concern for the nonself,” Heschel speaks of God as a personal Being in this limited sense: God “has concern for nondivine being.”⁴⁹ What distinguishes the divine glory from the sublime mystery, according to Heschel, is that this living presence that is “behind” all creation, that transcends and

⁴⁶Ibid., 121.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Abraham Joshua Heschel, “To Grow in Wisdom,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 84.

⁴⁹Heschel, Prophets, 622.

makes creation possible, that is experienced in the world and through events, is sensed as a being that is personally “for us.” Consequently, Heschel remarks:

To the religious man it is as if things stood with their backs to him, their faces turned to God, as if the glory of things consisted in their being an object of divine care.⁵⁰

Again, using the prophet’s experience as the paradigm, Heschel states:

Prophetic experience was not a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what has been called “something there,” but rather a feeling of subjective presence, a perception of what may be called *Someone here*. He is all-personal. He is all-Subject, not the object of man’s quest, but He who is in search of man.⁵¹

As such, the divine presence is sensed not just as personal concern, but first as the transcendent yet intimate interrogative that cannot be ignored.

What gives birth to religion is not intellectual curiosity, but the fact and experience of our being asked. As long as we frame and ponder our own questions, we do not even know how to ask. We know too little to be able to inquire. Faith is not the product of search and endeavor, but the answer to a challenge which no one can forever ignore.⁵²

Heschel’s concept of the subjectivity of God, which is central to his theology and anthropology, is intimately related to his understanding of divine glory. As suggested above, humans are neither meant nor able to comprehend God as object. Rather, God is the subject, humans the object. This is why scientific methods do not apply to religious questions and where the philosophical approach parts ways with the religious path. As quoted earlier, “To the philosopher God is an *object*, to men at prayer He is the *subject*.”⁵³ Heschel states:

⁵⁰Heschel, Who Is Man?, 90.

⁵¹Heschel, Prophets, 621.

⁵²Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 76.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 128.

To the prophet, God is always apprehended, experienced, and conceived as a *Subject*, never as an object. He appears as One Who demands, as One Who acts, Whose intention is to give righteousness and peace rather than to receive homage or adoration, Whose desire is to bestow rather than to obtain.

The prophet does not find God in his mind as object, but finds himself an object in God's mind. . . Thus, to know Him is to be known by Him.⁵⁴

If glory is not a quality or a thing but rather an act, then what is the content, or to be more precise, the intent of this divine act? The prophetic way of thinking indicates that the motivation and purpose are not merely to signal an overwhelming power in the world, not simply to suggest the spiritual context in which all life dwells, but rather to express divine concern, to communicate the fundamental orientation of God that we might describe as *for the sake of or being there for*. Heschel asserts:

He whose thinking is guided by the prophets would say: God's presence is my first thought; His unity and transcendence, my second; His concern and involvement (justice and compassion), my third. Upon reflection, however, he will realize that all three thoughts are one. God's presence in the world is, in essence, His concern for the world. . . The fundamental thought in the Bible is not creation, but God's care of His creation.⁵⁵

We see, then, that divine glory is not a quality or an attribute of God but the way God is in the world.

Glory reveals the will of God, and that includes relationality, or *covenant*. In this sense, glory resembles a verb more than a noun or an adjective.⁵⁶ Glory points to the fact that God not only acts in the world and relates to all creation, but especially that God acts *for the sake of Israel, humankind, and the world*. Divine presence is the dynamic expression and revelation of the dream and design of God. It indicates that the divine

⁵⁴Heschel, *Prophets*, 621.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 619.

⁵⁶Alfred McBride, *Heschel: Religious Educator* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1973), 63.

presence is not neutral but always *on behalf of* and *directed toward* another.⁵⁷

Glory is a synonym for God's concern for the world.⁵⁸ Heschel insists, "We can do justice to human being only by relating it to the transcendent care for being."⁵⁹ That there is life, that the universe is, that we exist and are at all, is a sign of who God is. He states:

Being is either open to, or dependent on, what is more than being, namely, the care for being, or it is a cul de sac, to be explained in terms of self-sufficiency. . . . There is a care that hovers over being. Being is surpassed by concern for being. Being would cease to be were it not for God's care for being.⁶⁰

For Heschel, the concern inherent in God's glory manifests itself in two primary ways: as *divine challenge* and as *divine care*. The first is experienced as an invitation, a personal call or a summons, and elicits faith. The second, necessarily and intimately related to the first, is experienced as pathos and evokes human sympathy. As stated above, in Heschel's interpretation, divine glory is the presence not the essence of God and refers to the goodness of God. As such, as we will see in the following chapters, divine pathos, which combines both care and challenge, is the most revealing and fullest expression of God's goodness.⁶¹ In the divine will, presence and pathos are inseparable. Both usher forth from divine care and signify the effulgence of divine essence.

There is no more illuminative example than the Lurianic Kabbalistic concept of

⁵⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 84.

⁵⁸Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 186.

⁵⁹Heschel, Who Is Man?, 91.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 91-92.

⁶¹Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 84. Merkle stresses the integral relationship between the transcendent challenge and the transcendent concern in Heschel's understanding of God's Presence.

tsimtsum to show how the divine glory holds together the various notions of God's initiative, freedom, presence, invitation, and care as well as polarity and the divine desire for relationship. In *tsimtsum* we see that in the beginning, from the first moment of the primordial creative act, divine presence implies an invitation that comes by way of a self-imposed absence that makes the universe possible and indicates God's willingness and desire to enter into relationship. Heschel writes:

Creation in the language of the Bible is an act of expression. God said, "Let there be"; and it was. And creation is not an act that happened once, but a continuous process. The word *Yehi*, "Let there be," stands forever in the universe. If it were not for the presence of that word, there would be no world.⁶²

Like creation itself, which is not a static, once-in-time incident, divine glory is an ongoing event of hospitality whereby humans are continuously called into being and the recipients of divine concern. It is not possible to speak of the presence of God without talking about the concern of God. Nor is it possible to speak of the concern of God without inferring the presence of God. Divine presence is divine care. John Merkle states it this way:

... the transcendent concern and the transcendent challenge are experienced simultaneously; they are even experienced as being of one and the same transcendent reality. This is because the transcendent concern for being carries with it a challenge to live in a way that is worthy of that concern, to share that concern; and the transcendent challenge is itself an expression of concern, for the challenge to embrace a life of concern must itself be born of concern.⁶³

We turn now to consider the indirect and direct responses to divine presence, beginning first with the reactions of humility, indebtedness, gratefulness, and praise. These responses mark the movement from wonder and awe as natural human answers to

⁶²Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 145.

⁶³Merkle, *Genesis of Faith*, 84.

sublimity and mystery to faith as the conscious responsiveness to God.

Indebtedness, Embarrassment, and Gratefulness

Radical amazement—the constellation of wonder, awe, and reverence—is the gateway to indebtedness and gratefulness. It is here, in these preconceptual, pretheological experiences, that the divine first intrudes not only on human consciousness but also on human consciences. Heschel avers, “The soul is endowed with a sense of indebtedness, and wonder, awe, and fear unlock that sense of indebtedness.”⁶⁴ In the midst of wonder and awe, in the presence of radical amazement that alludes to transcendent meaning and the divine glory, a sense of requiredness emerges which signals a deep awareness that the question is not one we pose ourselves but one addressed to us. For the religious person, radical amazement, as that state of being asked, alludes to one who asks. Indebtedness and gratefulness, as the fruits of wonder and awe, imply one to whom thanks is owed. The requiredness that is inherent in human being, is not merely ontological and generic but religious and specific. It resides, in other words, not in being itself but in being a recipient of being. With a tip of the hat to Schleiermacher, Heschel notes, “God is not only a power we depend on, He is a God who demands. . . . [T]here are ends which are in need of us.”⁶⁵ For Heschel, human being implies religious doing.

The ineffable and the sublime mystery are overtures of divine presence eliciting human obligation. Radical amazement opens the inner chamber where indebtedness is stored in all human persons. When we experience the preciousness and the gratuitousness

⁶⁴Heschel, God in Search of Man, 112.

⁶⁵Heschel, Who Is Man?, 109.

not only of the world but also of being itself, when we sense the miraculous nature and givenness of our own beings in particular, and when through the spiritual suggestiveness of the ineffable nature of reality we discern the divine presence who is the generous source, then we know that to be is to be indebted. For Heschel,

Indebtedness is given with our being human because our being is not simply being, our being is created. Being created means . . . that the “ought” precedes the “is.” The world is such that in its face one senses owingness rather than ownership. The world is such that in sensing its presence one must be responsive as well as responsible.⁶⁶

The antithesis of wonder, awe, and reverence is a spirit of presumption, arrogance, and hubris. “For God is everywhere save in arrogance.”⁶⁷ For Heschel, at worst, the modern person is self-absorbed, self-conceited, or anxious, and therefore impervious or callous to the gratuity that is life. He reminds, “The world was not made by man. The earth is the Lord’s not a derelict. What we own, we owe. How shall I repay to the Lord all his bounties? (Psalm 116:12)”⁶⁸ This is the question that concerns the pious person.

Indebtedness is sandwiched between humility and gratitude. Humility, what Heschel refers to as “ultimate embarrassment,” is indebtedness in its infancy, whereas gratefulness is indebtedness in its full maturity. In a culture that has been diagnosed by contemporary psychological diviners of the human psyche as shame-based and guilt-ridden, Heschel unhesitatingly declares, “What the world needs is a sense of embarrassment” and earlier he insists, “The end of embarrassment would be the end of

⁶⁶Ibid., 118.

⁶⁷Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 145.

⁶⁸Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 112.

humanity.”⁶⁹ According to Heschel, before we can fully appreciate the splendor of being and the mystery of becoming human, we must first come to grips with the magnificence of God. He states:

There are no concepts which we could appoint to designate the greatness of God or to represent Him to our minds. He is not a being, whose existence could be either confirmed or described by our thoughts. He is a reality, in the face of which, when becoming alive to its meaning, we are overtaken with a feeling of infinite unworthiness.⁷⁰

However, Heschel is not interested in inflicting people with guilt but in awakening people to their innate, divine image and to the subsequent responsibility. It is this awareness that exposes persons to the disparity between their behavior and their being, between the unmerited extravagance of the divine invitation and the paucity of the human response. Heschel’s written works, both the content and evocative style, are intended to remind the readers that they are sacred images and thus to stir them to the responsiveness and responsibility commensurate to that original dignity. Heschel states:

Embarrassment is a response to the discovery that in living we either replenish or frustrate a wondrous expectation. It involves an awareness of the grandeur of existence that may be wasted, of a waiting ignored, of unique moments missed.⁷¹

It is because of the ultimacy of the question and the unparalleled privilege of being asked that Heschel speaks not merely of human reticence or modesty but of a sense of ultimate embarrassment. He claims:

Religion depends upon what man does with his ultimate embarrassment. It is the awareness that the world is too great for him, the awareness of the grandeur and mastery of being, the awareness of being present at the unfolding of an

⁶⁹Ibid., 114.

⁷⁰Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 129.

⁷¹Heschel, Who Is Man?, 113.

inconceivable eternal saga.⁷²

Like awe, which is both an antecedent and an essential part of full-grown faith, “embarrassment not only precedes religious commitment; it is the touchstone of religious experience.”⁷³ It suggests the awareness of who God is and of what it means to be human. Paradoxically, it is a sure sign of both the greatness of God and the eminence of being human.

The inner life begins with a sense of indebtedness. Indebtedness is a combination of humility and awe. It means to be grateful for a gift received and to sense the obligation to respond to the transcendent requiredness that is built-in to divine glory. Rather than being a burden or a source of guilt, Heschel understands indebtedness to be an intrinsic and essential dimension of human dignity, the awareness that something is expected of the human person, and the foretaste of being a partner of God. The privilege of human living is signaled in the realization that life is “a sublime expectation, a waiting for. With every child born a new expectation enters the world.”⁷⁴ For the religious person, that which inaugurates the life of faith—indebtedness—over time becomes a constitutive dimension of faith, an act of love, and a sign of hope.

It is the realization of our inadequacy and of our being asked, the admission of our shortsightedness and of the divine perspective, and the awareness of our pretension and of God’s pathos, where indebtedness gives way to gratefulness. Authentic living happens when persons learn how to respond, how to reciprocate. Gratefulness is the most natural,

⁷²Ibid., 112.

⁷³Ibid., 113.

⁷⁴Ibid., 108.

fitting, and plentiful response to the ineffable mystery of existence and to God's glory. That it is natural means it is intrinsic to the human soul, present but latent. That it is fitting suggests it is right and just, necessary and compatible with being human. That it is plentiful means gratitude involves our entire being. That it is a response signals the evocation of divine glory and the reply that humans must communicate. "The truth of being human," says Heschel, "is gratitude; its secret is appreciation. . . . To be human involves the ability to appreciate as well as the ability to give expression to appreciation."⁷⁵ Humans realize gratefulness as it is practiced. Gratefulness is practiced as it is realized.

In a rare, but poignant autobiographical anecdote, Heschel recalls a scene when he was a twenty-year old student in Berlin, sad and alone, having dared to venture forth by himself from the insular, pious Hasidic world of his youth against the wishes of his family and community. One evening while walking the magnificent streets of Berlin, admiring the city's architecture and the tangible signs of a dynamic civilization, he suddenly realizes that the sun has gone down, but that he has neglected to pray. He recounts the first words of the *Mishna* dealing with evening prayer: "*From what time may one recite the Shema in the evening?*" He then recalls, "I had forgotten God—I had forgotten Sinai—I had forgotten that sunset is my business—that my task is "to restore the world to the kingship of the Lord."⁷⁶

For the pious person, the one whose integrity and appreciation is commensurate with the "inconceivable surprise of living," indebtedness flowers into gratefulness. In his

⁷⁵Ibid., 114, 116.

⁷⁶Heschel, Quest for God, 96.

book, Man's Quest for God, at the end of a passage defining prayer, he shows the entwinement of the human lacework that is humility, indebtedness, and gratefulness. He writes:

Who is worthy to be present at the constant unfolding of time? Amidst the meditation of mountains, the humility of flowers—wiser than all alphabets—clouds that die constantly for the sake of His glory, *we* are hating, hunting, hurting. Suddenly we feel ashamed of our clashes and complaints in the face of the tacit glory in nature. It is so embarrassing to live! How strange we are in the world, and how presumptuous our doings! Only one response can maintain us: gratefulness for witnessing the wonder, for the gift of our unearned right to serve, to adore, and to fulfill. It is gratefulness which makes the soul great.⁷⁷

For Heschel, gratefulness is the signature of the pious man, the measure of the pious woman (the word *hasidim* means “the pious ones”). Indebtedness and gratefulness are what one who is committed to the vocation of being human initially does with wonder and awe. Heschel remarks, “To a noble person it is a holy joy to remember, an overwhelming thrill to be grateful, while to a person whose character is neither rich nor strong, gratitude is a most painful sensation.”⁷⁸ The gratefulness humans experience and express is not merely for the satisfaction of needs but for “the surprise of just being” and for the awesome opportunity to reciprocate. Heschel declares:

The only answer to the ineffable is a mode of living compatible with the ineffable.

Human life is a point where mind and mystery meet. This is why man cannot live by his reason alone, nor can he thrive on mystery alone. To surrender to the mystery is fatalism, to withdraw into reason is solipsism. Man is driven to commune with that which is beyond the mystery. The ineffable in him seeks a way to that which is beyond the ineffable.⁷⁹

Indebtedness and gratefulness are the first steps in living a life compatible with

⁷⁷Ibid., 5.

⁷⁸Abraham Joshua Heschel, “In Search of Exaltation” in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 334.

⁷⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 353.

the sublime mystery of existence that alludes to a divine source. The mystery—of, in, and beyond life—awakens and summons the mystery of and in the human person.

Indebtedness, gratefulness and as we shall see, praise, are the ineffable in the human person seeking communion with the Ineffable One. Evidence of the greatness of the human soul, they are the first seeds of faith, the reverent response rooted in the innate intuition and mystical illumination that “the ultimate mystery is not an enigma but the God of mercy; that the Creator of all is the ‘Father of heaven.’”⁸⁰ As that which was only suspected comes to be experienced—indebtedness and gratefulness become fundamental dimensions of the full response of faith to a personal divine presence.

Praise

Not only indebtedness and gratefulness lead to faith. Praise does as well. According to Heschel, “Praise precedes faith. First we sing, then we believe.”⁸¹ Grounded in the soil of existential humility, a sense of indebtedness, and grateful awareness, praise buds and blossoms in the absence of presumption and pretension. When in the reverent response of awe the sense of mystery gives way to the experience that in and beyond the mystery is the presence of God, when consumed by the precious givenness of all life persons sense that the gifts shower forth from a kind and generous *Giver*, then indebtedness becomes gratefulness and gratefulness blooms into worship, into praise. For in receiving a gift, Heschel explains, the recipient obtains, not just the gift, but the love of the giver as well.⁸² Praise emerges when wonder is no longer enough, when awe no

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Heschel, Who Is Man?, 116.

⁸²Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 291.

longer contains us. Heschel insists:

Unless we know how to praise Him, we cannot learn how to know Him. Praise is our first answer to the wonder. Indeed in the face of the sublime what is left for us to do except to praise, to be aflame with the inability to say what we see and to feel ashamed of not knowing how to thank for the ability to see.⁸³

Praise is the way indebtedness is first expressed when, despite “the inability to say what [God’s] presence means,” the person becomes aware that “the whole earth is full of [God’s] glory.”⁸⁴ Heschel believes, “each creature has its own hymn of praise with which to extol the Creator,” and adds, “the Biblical man in sensing the sublime is carried away by his eagerness to exalt and praise the Maker of the world.”⁸⁵

However, “we sense more than we can say,” contends Heschel, which insinuates, first, that praise emanates from what we sense, and second, that praise is not the expression *of* what we sense but the response *to* what we sense. Heschel understands praise to be the encounter with “the realness of God.” And even though he claims “the living encounter with reality takes place on a level that precedes conceptualization, on a level that is responsive, *immediate, preconceptual, and presymbolic*,”⁸⁶ he asserts, “worship comes out of insight.”⁸⁷ The insight can be and is preconceptual because it occurs on the level where “the great things happen to the soul.”⁸⁸ Heschel states:

The roots of ultimate insights are found . . . not on the level of discursive thinking, but on the level of wonder and radical amazement, in the depth of awe, in our

⁸³Ibid., 74.

⁸⁴Heschel, Quest for God, 62.

⁸⁵Heschel, God in Search of Man, 96, 41.

⁸⁶Ibid., 115.

⁸⁷Heschel, Quest for God, 60.

⁸⁸Heschel, God in Search of Man, 96, 117.

sensitivity to the mystery, in our awareness of the ineffable.⁸⁹

That persons cannot clearly and distinctly articulate verbally what they experience does not contradict the source or the validity of their experience. On the contrary, the inability to communicate what one senses, is one of the characteristics of praise. In the presence of glory words are inadequate. Only singing will do.⁹⁰ Praise is that “certainty without knowledge in the depth of our being” that is awakened and evoked by the sublime mystery and the presence of God. The mystery and the presence are responded to before one can grasp or articulate them. In fact, praise is the result of being grasped by the glory of God, of being overtaken by awe even though the person cannot comprehend or conceptualize it.

In the transition from radical amazement, which is the response to the ineffable mystery, to praise, which is the response to divine glory, we identify not only the beginning of faith, but locate the original impulse to worship. To praise is to worship, and worship is not merely to wonder or to admire but to pray, to adore, to pay homage. Praise is joy aimed at God. Praise, as an aspect of human responsiveness, is an act of worship that “makes man a relative to the sublime, initiating him into the mystery.”⁹¹ It is the sense of transcendent requiredness, of being challenged, of something being asked of us and responding, that signals not only the divine glory but also the shift from the sense of indebtedness as an ontological reality to praise as a spiritual reply.

Although Heschel allows for the possibility of a nebulous feeling of gratefulness,

⁸⁹Ibid., 117.

⁹⁰Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 74; Heschel, God in Search of Man, 95; Heschel, Quest for God, 63.

⁹¹Heschel, Quest for God, 13.

a general sense of appreciation for life and things, when fully realized, he emphasizes, indebtedness, gratitude, and praise are no longer merely the antecedents to faith but are especially and explicitly religious responses, conscious and intentional acts of faith.

While it is true to say that praise transforms wonder and awe into faith, it is also true to say that faith transposes radical amazement and appreciation into praise. For Heschel, the human person as defined in the Bible, is indebted *to God* and owes *God* thanks and praise. The pious man or woman is the person who is vitally and perennially aware of the graciousness and awesomeness of the divine bequest and of the human obligation that comes with it. Heschel states, “God is of no importance unless He is of supreme importance.”⁹² Praise is corroboration that humans consider God to be of supreme importance. If, as Heschel sings, “It is gratefulness which makes the soul great,” then it is praise that makes the soul God’s.⁹³

What is most striking and unique about Heschel’s definition of praise is his understanding that whereas glory signals divine concern for the world, praise, in turn, denotes human concern for God. As we will see in Chapter Six, God’s concern for humanity is what makes possible humanity’s concern for God. Here Heschel lays the foundation for a piety that connects praise and pathos, the mystical and the prophetic, worship and compassionate action. For Heschel, to praise means to share God’s concern.⁹⁴ To reapply a familiar spiritual adage, Heschel contends prophetic spirituality demonstrates God practicing the presence of humankind and in response humankind

⁹²Ibid., xiii.

⁹³Ibid., 5.

⁹⁴Ibid., 18.

practicing the presence of God.⁹⁵ Glory is God's presence toward us. Praise is our initial religious act of being present toward God. In praise, presence and concern meet. Evoked by the glory of God, praise is the full and fitting way humans are to relate to God. As the antecedent to faith and yet the fullest expression of faith, praise is the act of attaching oneself to God and to that which is of passionate interest to God.

Because praise is essentially an act of worship, it is fundamentally personal while being necessarily communal and cosmic. Worship then is not only the intuitive and proper response of the individual to the presence of God, but also is "an act of participating in an eternal service, in the service of all souls of all ages. Every act of adoration is done in union with all of history."⁹⁶ The extension of radical amazement, praise is the antidote to isolation and apathy. According to Heschel, praise cannot be quarantined:

As an act of personal recognition our praise would be fatuous, it is only meaningful as an act of joining in the endless song. We praise with the pebbles on the road which are like petrified amazement, with all the flowers and trees which look as if hypnotized in silent devotion.⁹⁷

Praise creates conciliation and kinship among all living beings in the celebration of life.

The stars sing; the mountains tremble in His presence. . . . Man is not alone in celebrating God. To praise Him is to join all things in their song to Him. Our kinship with nature is a kinship of praise. All beings praise God. We live in a community of praise.⁹⁸

As the human choice to make God's concern one's own, "as an act of inner agreement

⁹⁵Brother Lawrence Herman, Practicing the Presence of God, trans. John J. Delaney (New York: Doubleday, 1977).

⁹⁶Heschel, Quest for God, 46.

⁹⁷Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 74.

⁹⁸Heschel, God in Search of Man, 96, 95.

with God,” praise plays an integral role in the journey toward becoming human.⁹⁹ It is not merely the sense of the sublime mystery but the sense of the presence of God that ignites human becoming as a religious vocation and leads to faith.

Faith

The task of becoming human is most fully realized in the act of faith. Heschel states emphatically, “This indeed, is the greatness of man: to be able to have faith.”¹⁰⁰ However, as Heschel makes clear, “faith does not come out of nothing.” Heschel claims:

What gives rise to faith is not a sentiment, a state of mind, an aspiration, but an everlasting fact in the universe, something which is prior to and independent of human knowledge and experience—the holy dimension of existence.¹⁰¹

It is in this holy but preconceptual dimension of life that faith first sprouts. It springs from the soil of attentive, significant living, in the pretheological attitudes that are requisite for its full blooming. Heschel asserts:

There are antecedents of religious commitment, acts that happen within the depths of the person, moments that necessitate groping for faith: the sense of wonder and mystery, reverence and radical amazement, the sense of indebtedness and embarrassment, the fallacy of absolute expedience, the demonic nature of man’s false sense of sovereignty, openness to history, concern for ultimate meaning of existence, the vital importance of inwardness, the awareness of man’s ultimate accountability before God.¹⁰²

Before wonder, awe, ultimate embarrassment, indebtedness, gratefulness, and praise are the constitutive components and the vital expressions of a living faith, they are the genesis and the antecedents of it.

⁹⁹Heschel, Quest for God, 18.

¹⁰⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 118.

¹⁰¹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 237.

¹⁰²Heschel, “Idols in the Temple,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 68.

As radical amazement is the appropriate answer to the ineffable, and awe the fitting reply to mystery, so faith is the primary and most definitive response to the experience of divine glory. If glory is God's presence, and if that presence is by divine will directed toward the world and on behalf of humanity, then faith is humanity's intentional presence to and for God. "The decisive thought in the message of the prophets," claims Heschel, "is not the presence of God to man but rather the presence of man to God."¹⁰³ Faith is being *on behalf of* God. Unlike the atheist who is concerned about the existence of God, for the person of faith, the issue is not whether God is dead or alive but whether the human person is dead or alive to the realness of God.¹⁰⁴ Faith is human presence aware of and responsive to divine presence. Whereas praise is the initial response to the glory of God, faith is faithfulness to that response.¹⁰⁵ Faith includes praise, but is not exhausted by it.

Faith is being consciously present and continually responsive to the Presence of God. Whether expressed in prayer or embodied in *mitzvot* (good deeds), faith is the attachment of the whole person to God and to what interests God. It is the attunement of human sympathy with divine pathos. In his typically provocative, aphoristic style, Heschel declares, "God means: No one is ever alone."¹⁰⁶ We can infer that human means: God is never alone. This partnership, for Heschel, is what makes living faithful and holy. It is the stated and unstated core of all Heschel's theological writings and is captured in

¹⁰³Heschel, God in Search of Man, 118.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 127.

¹⁰⁵Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 190.

¹⁰⁶Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 109.

the titles of three of his major works. We can say it this way: Glory means, "Man Is Not Alone," because "God [is] in Search of Man" (divine pathos). Faith means, God is not alone because gratefulness for being asked engenders "Man's Quest for God."

Since, as was mentioned above, glory is neither an inert nor impersonal presence but a personal expectation and challenge, Heschel emphasizes that "the essence of Judaism is a demand rather than a creed."¹⁰⁷ Consequently, faith is the response to God's behest, the human commitment in answer to the divine command. "What gives birth to religion," states Heschel, "is not intellectual curiosity but the fact and experience of our being asked."¹⁰⁸ He writes:

Religion is not a feeling for something that is, but *an answer* to Him who is asking us to live in a certain way. It is in its very origin a consciousness of total commitment; a realization that all of life is not only man's but also God's sphere of interest.¹⁰⁹

Earlier he states:

Consciousness of God is a response, and God is a challenge rather than a notion. We do not think Him, we are stirred by Him. . .

His is the call, ours the paraphrase; His is the creation, ours a reflection. He is not an object to be comprehended, a thesis to be endorsed; neither the sum of all that is (facts) nor a digest of all that ought to be (ideals). He is the ultimate subject.¹¹⁰

Whereas radical amazement is the sense of being asked, faith is what humans do with the awareness of being asked. Anything but a "short cut to the mystery of God,"

¹⁰⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 330.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 293.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 160.

faith requires constancy and the commitment to stay alert.¹¹¹ Heschel states:

The truth is that faith is not a way but the breaking of a way, of the soul's passageway constantly to be dug through mountains of callousness. . .

We do not stumble into achievements. Faith is the fruit of hard, constant care and vigilance, of insistence upon remaining true to a vision; not an act of inertia but an aspiration to maintain our responsiveness to Him alive.¹¹²

Faith is the fundamental responsiveness to the sense of the spiritual significance of life and living, to the felt presence of God (to use Rolheiser's term), and to the wonder of being involved in the mystery of God and humankind. Faith, as responsiveness to divine gratuitousness and transcendent requiredness is another name for human becoming since becoming human only occurs in relationship to God, that is, through, with, and in God.

In his book, Man Is Not Alone, Heschel makes the distinction between faith and tradition, doctrine, dogma, and creed. About the first, he says, "Authentic faith is more than an echo of a tradition. It is a creative situation, an event." Heschel stresses:

A Jew does not believe alone; he believes with the community of Israel; he shares an insight of three thousand years of sacred Jewish history. Religious living is not only a private concern. Our own life is a movement in the symphony of ages. We are taught to pray as well as to live in the first person plural, to do the good "in the name of Israel." All generations are present in every generation. The community of Israel lives in every Jew.¹¹³

However, he just as emphatically argues:

to have faith does not mean . . . to dwell in the shadow of old ideas conceived by prophets and sages, to live off an inherited estate of doctrines and dogmas. In the realm of spirit only he who is a pioneer is able to be an heir. The wages of spiritual plagiarism is the loss of integrity.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 88.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Heschel, God in Search of Man, 424.

¹¹⁴ Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 164-65.

For Heschel, faith is never merely being the beneficiary of the heirlooms of others. The collective treasury of a faithful people, faith is nonetheless “original with every soul.”¹¹⁵ “Faith is not the clinging to a shrine but an endless pilgrimage of the heart.”¹¹⁶ It is the continual reinterpretation of significant communal events and the reactivation of momentous personal situations. It is the way of faith to make personal what is communal or universal. He asserts:

In the realm of science, a question may be asked and an answer given by one man for all men. In the realm of religion, the question must be faced and the answer given by every individual soul.¹¹⁷

As a Jew, Heschel acknowledges that some events, some historical moments are more significant than others. He also believes “the voice of Sinai goes on forever,”¹¹⁸ and that to suggest “the dogma of the total silence of God” is a “frightful slur.”¹¹⁹ “God is not always silent,” insists Heschel, “and man is not always blind. His glory fills the world; His spirit hovers above the waters. There are moments in which, to use a Talmudic phrase, heaven and earth kiss each other.”¹²⁰ Heschel contends:

In every man’s life there are moments when there is a lifting of the veil at the horizon of the known, opening a sight of the eternal. Each of us has at least once in his life experienced the momentous reality of God. Each of us has once caught a glimpse of the beauty, peace and power that flow through the souls of those who are devoted to Him. But such experiences or inspirations are rare events. . . The remembrance of that experience and the loyalty to the response of that moment are the forces that sustain our faith. In this sense, *faith is faithfulness*, loyalty to an

¹¹⁵Ibid., 91.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 174.

¹¹⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 153.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 138.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 173-74.

¹²⁰Ibid., 138.

event, loyalty to our response.¹²¹

As Heschel points out, even discounting a rare experience of “the momentous reality of God,” there are glimpses of glory everyday for those who have eyes to see. Thus, the human tragedy is that “the wonders are daily with us, and yet the miracle is not recognized by him who experiences it.”¹²² As inferred above, for Heschel, callousness, not doubt, is the antithesis of and obstacle to faith. One of the defining characteristics of the person of faith is that

his sight perceives something indicative of the divine. In the small things he senses the significant, in the common and the simple he senses the ultimate; in the rush of the passing he feels the stillness of the eternal.¹²³

Similarly, Heschel distinguishes between faith and belief. He states: “Belief is the mental acceptance of a proposition or a fact as true on the ground of authority or evidence, the conviction of the truth of a given proposition or an alleged fact.”¹²⁴

Conversely, faith is “not an assent to an idea, but the consent to God.”¹²⁵ He continues:

Faith is a relation to God; belief a relation to an idea or a dogma. Unlike belief (which is the accompaniment of knowledge or apprehension, the assent given to what we know), faith surges beyond knowledge and apprehension; it refers not to the knowable but to that which transcends knowledge. . .

Faith . . . is not only the assent to a proposition, but the staking of a whole life on the truth of an invisible reality.¹²⁶

Faith is neither synonymous with the content of belief nor with the deductive thinking

¹²¹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 165.

¹²²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 85.

¹²³Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 278.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 165.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 166.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 166, 167

that leads to the assent or formulation of propositions. That is, it is not identical to creed, doctrine, or dogma. Faith does not refer to the human quest for mere information.¹²⁷ It is an attitude and aspiration that comes out of the soul prior to any formulation of any creed.¹²⁸ Says Heschel:

Faith is an act of the whole person, of mind, will, and heart. Faith is sensitivity, understanding, engagement, and attachment; not something achieved once and for all, but an attitude one may gain and lose.¹²⁹

As opposed to faith, creed, dogma, and doctrine are secondary level responses, codified expressions of an immediate experience. A creed provides a pattern for living. However, whereas faith is loyalty to an event or to the response to an event, whether momentous or mundane, creed, doctrine, and dogma too often become the crystallization of an idea or the petrification of an opinion. Although necessary and helpful, Heschel warns that doctrines can become substitutes for insight. He notes:

Dogmas are obstacles unless they serve as humble signposts on the way. They are allusive rather than informative or descriptive. When taken literally, they either turn flat, narrow and shallow or become ventriloquous myths. The dogma of creation, for example, has often been reduced to a tale and robbed of its authentic meaning, while as an allusion to an ultimate fact it is of inexhaustible relevance.¹³⁰

Faith is not something external, some objective truth “out there” that one accepts, knows, or affirms. Faith is “an act, something that happens rather than something stored away; it is a moment in which the soul of man communes with the glory of God.”¹³¹

¹²⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 153.

¹²⁸Heschel, “Faith,” in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 337.

¹²⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 154.

¹³⁰Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 168.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 87.

The soul communing with the glory of God implies a sacred interaction. Faith is a relationship of mutual interest and responsibility, an exchange of love. Heschel states:

The essence of Judaism is the awareness of the *reciprocity* of God and man, of man's *togetherness* with Him who abides in eternal otherness. For the task of living is His and ours and so is the responsibility.¹³²

Given a uniquely Heschelian twist, faith is not the unilateral action of humans toward God but the reciprocal movement *between* God and humans. Faith is born in God and returns to God through righteous human living. It is not the sole possession or responsibility of humans. For Heschel, faith is what happens between humans and the divine when the ineffable in humans reaches out to the Ineffable One who is in search of humankind. From the human perspective, faith is the human response to God's faith in us, the "act of believing" that God believes in us. Even though "we receive more than we can give,"¹³³ Heschel states,

Faith is real only when it is not one-sided but reciprocal. Man can rely on God, if God can rely on man. We must trust in Him because He trusts in us. Our trustworthiness for God is the measure of the integrity of our faith. Thus faith is an awareness of Divine mutuality and companionship, a form of communion between God and man.¹³⁴

This viewpoint contests the more customary notion of faith as being a deep human sentiment and an exclusively human venture. This means not only that divine glory is the presence of God, but also that this presence is the sure sign of God's faith in humankind, since from the perspective of faith, God never merely *is* but always *is for* or *with* us. The biblical word for this intimate movement between God and humans is

¹³²Ibid., 242.

¹³³Heschel, "Faith," in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 333.

¹³⁴Ibid., 331-32.

covenant which for Heschel specifically connotes mutual commitment and mutual responsibility.

Rather than a final human achievement, faith means “always being on the way.”¹³⁵ Faith requires the continual commitment to what is relevant to God and the daily decision not to succumb to callousness and indifference. Although initiated by God, presence, whether divine or human, indicates concern. “Jewish faith,” Heschel instructs, “is not a formula. It is an attitude, the joy of living a life in which God has a stake, or being involved with God.”¹³⁶ For Heschel, piety is the final achievement of faith, the mature and full engagement with God most tangibly expressed in prayer, holy deeds, and the work of *tikkun*. We turn now in our discussion to prayer, that privileged way persons embody and express their faith and involve themselves in the life of God.

Prayer

Few contemporary theologians have given as much attention to and written as eloquently about prayer as has Heschel. Embodying Evagrius’ adage that the theologian is the one whose prayer is true, what Heschel writes about prayer is clearly the fruit of the practice of prayer that sustained and enriched his own inner life. Disciple and friend, Samuel Dresner affirms this statement that Heschel’s analysis and description of prayer “is surely, in part, personal.” He describes a formative experience of joining Heschel for daily worship in the 1940’s. He writes:

I would join him in his room at dawn to pray the morning service. Those were unforgettable hours. With his large prayer shawl about him and his tefillin on his

¹³⁵Heschel, “Idols in the Temples,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 66.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*

head and arm, he paced the room reciting the long pages by heart, at first slowly and softly but then more quickly and loudly, the words flowing as a torrent from him, at times roaring like a lion, rising at last to a culmination of motionless silence, all within. Time opened to eternity.¹³⁷

As zaddik, Heschel's life was immersed in and guided by prayer. He writes:

Prayer is not a strategem for occasional use, a refuge to resort to now and then. It is rather like an established residence for the innermost self. All things have a home: the bird a nest, the fox has a hole, the bee has a hive. A soul without prayer is a soul without a home.¹³⁸

Rabbi Heschel, a man at home in prayer, sought to recover "the primacy of prayer in our inner existence."¹³⁹ Let's explore the main features of Heschel's understanding of prayer, keeping in mind how this might bear on a mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care.

First, because he views prayer as a particular way of being in the world and in relationship to God, it makes sense that Heschel would see prayer as the specific yet intimately related responses to both the veiled overtures and the more overt expressions of divine presence described or mentioned above: the ineffable, mystery, glory, and pathos. Before prayer blooms as the conscious interaction between the human and the divine, it appears first as the bud of wonder and awe *in response to* the incomprehensible surprise of being itself, the sublime grandeur of the physical universe, the mystery infused and intuited in all reality, and the transcendent meaning within and behind the mystery. Heschel states, "Existence is interspersed with suggestions of transcendence, and openness to transcendence is a constitutive element of being human."¹⁴⁰ Thus,

¹³⁷Dresner, Heschel, Hasidism, and Halakha, 27.

¹³⁸Heschel, "On Prayer," in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 258.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 257.

¹⁴⁰Heschel, Who Is Man?, 66.

Heschel reiterates, “The way to prayer leads through acts of wonder and radical amazement.”¹⁴¹ In turn, the act of praying keeps wonder and amazement alive. For Heschel, the person of prayer is characterized by a spirit of openness and receptivity, not only alive to the pulse of wonder, “to what is solemn in the simple, [and] to what is sublime in the sensuous,” but also “alert to the dignity of every human being and to the spiritual value which even inanimate objects inalienably possess.”¹⁴²

Like faith, prayer is an event. “Genuine prayer,” Heschel emphasizes, “does not flow out of concepts. It comes out of the awareness of the mystery of God rather than out of information about Him.”¹⁴³ As an intentional, reverent act of faith, prayer is the conscious answer to the presence of God. As such, it integrates and transposes the meaning of the precognitive and pretheological experiences of wonder and awe by directly connecting them to God. Heschel comments:

To pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings, the divine margin in all attainments. Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living. It is all we can offer in return for the mystery by which we live.¹⁴⁴

In Quest for God, his most thorough treatment of prayer and worship, Heschel compares the spiritual life to a tree and again to a river suggesting that when the soul is detached from that which is greater than itself, it is like a tree torn from the soil or a river somehow separated from its source.¹⁴⁵ Heschel contends, “We have lost the power to pray

¹⁴¹Heschel, Quest for God, 63.

¹⁴²Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 286.

¹⁴³Heschel, Quest for God, 88.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 6. Actually this book is largely a compilation of previously published essays.

because we have lost the sense of [God's] reality."¹⁴⁶ Understood as the answer to the ongoing sense and inexpressible certainty of God's presence, prayer is "our attachment to the utmost."¹⁴⁷ Heschel states:

What is decisive is not the mystic experience of our being close to [God]; decisive is not our *feeling* but our *certainty* of His being close to us . . . Decisive is not our emotion but our conviction. If such conviction is lacking, if the presence of God is myth, then prayer to God is a delusion.... The true source of prayer . . . is not an emotion but an insight. It is the insight into the mystery of reality, the *sense of the ineffable*, that enables us to pray. As long as we refuse to take notice of what is beyond our sight, beyond our reason; as long as we are blind to the mystery of being, the way to prayer is closed to us.¹⁴⁸

In contrast to Alfred North Whitehead, whose understanding of religion is what persons do with their solitariness, Heschel conceives of religion as what one does with the presence of God.¹⁴⁹ In light of this, it is clear why he considers prayer to be at the core of religion, since most basically prayer is what we do with the presence of God. Prayer is not merely talking to God but the faithful attempt to be involved in the Presence of God, to participate in the life or action of God.

Although Heschel is clear that prayer is a gift, not a human achievement, he describes prayer as "an event that starts in man and ends in God."¹⁵⁰ Prayer is the person's deliberate, conscious awareness, enactment, and enjoyment of the connection that is always present (even if only hiddenly) between God and humans. "What marks the act of

¹⁴⁶Ibid., xiii.

¹⁴⁷Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 7.

¹⁴⁸Heschel, Quest for God, 62-63.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., xiv.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 9, 13.

prayer,” Heschel maintains, “is the decision to enter and face the presence of God.”¹⁵¹

One becomes a praying man or woman by praying.¹⁵²

As a response not only rooted in the awareness of the presence and nearness of God but more so in the awareness of God’s pathos for humanity and creation, prayer is the primary means by which the human-divine partnership is sustained. Faith is the fundamental relationship of being which flowers in the divine-human covenant. It is the continual recommitment of humans to be the partner of God who promises to be the partner of humankind. Faith is the concordant beat of the human heart keeping time with the heart of God.¹⁵³ In a beautiful passage Heschel writes:

God is unwilling to be alone, and man cannot forever remain impervious to what he longs to show. Those of us who cannot keep their striving back find themselves at times with the sight of the unseen and become aglow with its ray. Some of us blush, others wear a mask. Faith is a blush in the presence of God. . . .

But faith only comes when we stand face to face—the ineffable in us with the ineffable beyond us—suffer ourselves to be seen, to commune, to receive a ray and to reflect it. But to do that the soul must be alive within the mind.¹⁵⁴

From the human side, prayer is what insures the soul’s aliveness. Prayer is what makes us susceptible to blushing. Like the sunflower that is heliotropic, human life, says Heschel, is theotropic. Reminiscent of William Blake’s line, “And we are put on this earth a little space/ That we might learn to bear the beams of love,”¹⁵⁵ the human task, according to Heschel, is to turn oneself toward the love of God that we might “become aglow with its

¹⁵¹Ibid., 61.

¹⁵²Ibid., 24.

¹⁵³Heschel, God in Search of Man, 296.

¹⁵⁴Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 91.

¹⁵⁵William Blake, Poems and Prophecies (New York: Dutton, 1970), 10.

rays . . . and reflect [them].”¹⁵⁶ Rather than knowledge *about* God, faith is the experience of *being known by* God and the intentional, conscious effort to make oneself known *to* God. Prayer is the primary way we make ourselves known to God. But prayer means not only intentionally turning our face toward the rays of God’s love but also consciously concerning ourselves with what concerns God. In so doing, we insure that God is not alone. Heschel teaches that in addition to studying Torah, and performing sacred deeds (which we will discuss in the next chapter), prayer is one of the essential ways of experiencing God’s Presence and living out the covenant.

The second feature, for Heschel, is that prayer is an ontological necessity not an emotional need. If faith is human responsiveness to both divine gratuity and divine invitation, then prayer is, at once, the most basic and the fullest expression of becoming human, the most fitting and the noblest way by which humans exalt their existence and glorify God. Heschel believes the act of praying is humankind’s greatest privilege and distinction and the single most distinguishing factor in determining whether or not persons merely exist or truly live. Heschel states:

The dignity of man consists not in his ability to make tools, machines, guns, but primarily in his being endowed with the gift of addressing God. It is this gift which should be a part of the definition of man.¹⁵⁷

To say that prayer is an ontological necessity is not the same as saying that it is inevitable. It is possible to be a human being and never pray. However, Heschel insists, it is not possible to become human apart from prayer. Not to pray is to abstain from becoming fully human. To refrain from prayer is to forfeit one’s dignity and destiny as a

¹⁵⁶Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 91.

¹⁵⁷Heschel, Quest for God, 78.

human being. Prayer simultaneously humanizes and sanctifies people because it activates that sacred image planted deep within each human person. According to Heschel, as an integral and constitutive dimension of human becoming, prayer “takes the mind out of the narrowness of self-interest,” “is an act of self-purification,” “is a way to master what is inferior in us,” “is a way to discern between the signal and trivial, the vital and the futile,” “helps us discover . . . the pangs we ignore and the longings we forget,” “teaches us what to aspire to,” “implants in us what we ought to cherish,” “clarifies our hopes and intentions,” and “enables us to see the world in the mirror of the holy.”¹⁵⁸ It is in prayer that humans discover and remember what it means to be human because it is in the act of praying that persons are most truly and uniquely themselves before God. This journey toward self-realization always moves toward the realization of oneself in relation to God.

Third, in Heschel’s own concise declaration: “The issue of prayer is not prayer; the issue of prayer is God.”¹⁵⁹ He explains:

The self is not the hub, but the spoke of the revolving wheel. In prayer we shift the center of living from self-consciousness to self-surrender. God is the center toward which all forces tend.¹⁶⁰

Heschel makes it clear that while prayer enhances self-actualization, it does so by effecting self-forgetfulness.¹⁶¹ “Genuine prayer is an event in which man surpasses himself.”¹⁶² For Heschel, “prayer is the opposite of pretentiousness.”¹⁶³ Even though

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 7.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 58.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 7. See also 57.

¹⁶¹Ibid., xiii.

¹⁶²Ibid., 29.

¹⁶³Ibid., 26.

prayer is an expression of the whole person, he stresses that the goal of prayer is not self-expression but self-attachment to what is greater than the self. He states, "The supreme goal is to express God, to discover the self in relation to God."¹⁶⁴ In this "recentering of subjectivity" from self to God, two interrelated shifts occur: one, the Divine is no longer viewed or experienced as an object but rather as the ineffable Subject of which human beings are the object, and two, humans make God's concern their own.¹⁶⁵

The fourth feature in Heschel's understanding of prayer is that there are two basic types of prayer: prayer as "an act of expression" and prayer as "an act of empathy."¹⁶⁶ Whether in corporate liturgy or for the pious Jew praying alone the sacred prayers of his tradition, Heschel maintains the recentering of subjectivity often occurs in the relationship between words and prayer. In prayer as expression, the intention and the desire to pray come first and the words follow. If it is a concern, the concern comes and then the words follow to express that concern. Here "we endeavor to disclose ourselves to the Sustainer of all rather than to enclose the world in ourselves."¹⁶⁷ In prayer as empathy, the words arise first and the feeling follows. By entering into the words of the liturgy or the prayerbook or the psalms, for example, the pray-er (who may or may not be in the mood to pray), imagines in his or her mind and feels and empathizes in his or her heart the import of the words and thereby participates in the meaning with which the words are pregnant. "To be able to pray," Heschel writes, "is to know how to stand still and to dwell

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 31.

¹⁶⁵Kaplan, Holiness in Words, 4.

¹⁶⁶Heschel, Quest for God, 28ff.

¹⁶⁷Heschel, "Prayer as Discipline," in Insecurity of Freedom, 257.

upon a word.”¹⁶⁸ Elsewhere he explains “Praying means to take hold of a word, the end, so to speak, of a line that leads to God.”¹⁶⁹ In the act of expression, thoughts evoke corresponding words. In the act of empathy, words evoke corresponding feelings. In either case, at its core “prayer is a moment when humility is a reality,” since there are times when we arrive at thoughts that are beyond our ability to articulate and when the words we ponder allude to more than we can absorb.¹⁷⁰

Fifth, Heschel maintains authentic prayer requires both the reconsecration of words and the appreciation of silence. On the one hand, Heschel admits that “for the most part prayer lives in the words,” and a central focus of his writing on prayer is the need to recover the dignity, transformational power, and binding force of words. He depicts contemporary society’s attitude toward language as estranged and irreverent. Words are trivialized, misused, and defiled. Although words are the vehicle for prayer there is a problem. As alluded to above, the problem resides in the discrepancy between the heart and the words we are about to utter. Heschel insists, “Prayer without *kavanah* (inner participation) is like a body without a soul.”¹⁷¹ He emphasizes that whereas prayer involves presence, prayer is more than being present. He is all too aware of worship typified by “spiritual absenteeism” where “everything is present: decorum, voice, ceremony. But one thing is missing: *Life* . . . The words are there but the souls are

¹⁶⁸Heschel, Quest for God, 34.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁷⁰Heschel, “Prayer as Discipline,” in The Insecurity of Freedom, 257. Heschel, Quest for God, 37.

¹⁷¹Heschel, Quest for God, 12.

absent.”¹⁷² The question is not how to rejuvenate our prayer but how to revitalize the pray-er. Since “words of prayer,” for Heschel, “are repositories of the spirit,” he urges us to regain a sense of words as commitments. For just as “we pray the way we live,” so also we live the way we pray.¹⁷³

On the other hand, despite relying on the image of speech and language from time to time when describing personal prayer and liturgy, Heschel admits, “I am not ready to accept the ancient concept of prayer as dialogue. Who are we to enter a dialogue with God?”¹⁷⁴ In fact, he claims that “in a sense, prayer begins where expression ends.”¹⁷⁵ Since words are at best only the inspirers of prayer not the source, we can only achieve what we hoped for from words in and through our powerlessness. It is in our inability to articulate in words that which resides deepest in us that paradoxically enables us as ourselves to become expressions before God. It also gives God the opportunity to be God, that is, to extend tender mercy to us. Heschel cites Rabbi Wolf of Zhitomir who interprets a passage from the morning liturgy to mean:

God loves what is left over at the bottom of the heart and cannot be expressed in words. It is the ineffable in us which reaches God rather than the expressed feeling.¹⁷⁶

In the end, “We can only weep on the threshold of our incommunicable thirst after the

¹⁷²Ibid., 49, 51.

¹⁷³Heschel, “Prayer as Discipline,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 259, 260; Heschel, Quest for God, 12, 25, 26.

¹⁷⁴Heschel, “Prayer as Discipline,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 255.

¹⁷⁵Heschel, Quest for God, 39.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 40.

incomprehensible,”¹⁷⁷ trusting that “God hears not only prayer but also the desire to pray.”¹⁷⁸

Heschel quotes the psalmist who sings, “To Thee silence is praise,” (Psalm 65:2) and acknowledges that, although rare, “There is also a form of prayer that is beyond expression.”¹⁷⁹ At the highest level of human piety, the human person is reduced to stillness.¹⁸⁰ Heschel suggests that the Jewish liturgy, when prayed with *kavanah*, is, in fact, “a higher form of silence.” He continues:

It is pervaded by an awed sense of the grandeur of God which resists description and surpasses all expression. The individual is silent. He does not bring forth his own words. His saying the consecrated words is in essence an act of listening to what they convey. *The spirit of Israel speaks, the self is silent.*¹⁸¹

Knowing the grandeur and potency of words but the impotence of human expression, Heschel quotes the eleventh century Jewish poet-philosopher, Ibn Gabirol, who reminds us, “The highest form of worship is that of silence and hope” emphasizing again that “the language of the heart is the main thing.”¹⁸²

Heschel challenges the widespread understanding of prayer as talking to God by offering an alternative image to the commonly accepted but limited analogy of human conversation. In a sense, it is a way of re-imagining and combining the notions of speech and silence. He asserts, communicating with God is not the primary intent of prayer but

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 39.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 40.

¹⁷⁹Heschel, “Prayer as Discipline,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 260.

¹⁸⁰Heschel, *Quest for God*, 42.

¹⁸¹Ibid., 44.

¹⁸²Ibid., 41.

rather the graced effort to make ourselves *communicable* to God.¹⁸³ “Prayer is not a service of the lips,” he insists, “It is worship of the heart.”¹⁸⁴ He states:

Prayer is an emanation of what is most precious in us toward Him, the outpouring of the heart before Him. It is not a relationship between person and person, between subject and subject, but an endeavor to become the object of His thought.¹⁸⁵

He continues:

The purpose of prayer is to be brought to His attention, to be listened to, to be understood by Him; not to know Him but to *be known* to Him. To pray is . . . to strive to make our life a divine concern . . . To live ‘in the light of His countenance,’ to become a thought of God—this is the true career of man.¹⁸⁶

The aim of prayer is not to translate words but to translate the self in relation to God. The premise of prayer is not just divine presence but divine pathos, the revelatory insight that God is in pursuit of us and draws near to us out of transitive concern. Stillness and silence enhance our ability to sense the immediacy of God’s presence and the intensity of God’s concern. The psalmist relays God’s desire for humans: “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). One purpose of prayer, then, is to allow ourselves to be found by God. God’s question to Adam: *Where are you?* (Genesis 3:9) is

a call that goes out again and again. It is a still small echo of a still small voice, not uttered in words, not conveyed in categories of the mind, but ineffable and mysterious, as ineffable and mysterious as the glory that fills the whole world.¹⁸⁷

The hoped for reply from the person of faith, unlike that of our forebears, is not to hide

¹⁸³Ibid., 12, 25, 26.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., 67.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 10.

¹⁸⁶Ibid.

¹⁸⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 137.

from God's presence, but the courage to disclose oneself to the presence, judgment, compassion, and mercy of God. To the decisive question, "Where are you?" the pray-er responds, "Here I am." This is not passive resignation or a casual statement of fact, but rather "a complete turning of the heart toward God" and "the approach of the human to the transcendent."¹⁸⁸

Sixth, as mentioned in earlier chapters, Heschel believes in the polarity of the human person, but not only in humankind—in all reality. "You cannot . . . reduce any aspect of Jewish theology into one principle. There are always two principles. There is always a polarity of principles. To put it in a general way, there is always a *mystery* and there is a *meaning*."¹⁸⁹ In light of this, it is not surprising that he understands and appreciates the polarities inherent in prayer as well. Unlike those who take extremist positions, Rabbi Heschel strikes a balance. He argues for the importance and wisdom of holding opposites in tension, valuing both the tension and the reciprocity that comes from refusing to let go of one side of the equation to the exclusion of the other. Heschel believes the divorce between liturgy and life, prayer and practice is a shame and a scandal.¹⁹⁰ Accordingly, he writes, "Life is fashioned by prayer, and prayer is the quintessence of life."¹⁹¹ So polarity is an essential feature in his concept of prayer and he expounds on the need to give equal attention and force to what appear to be mutually exclusive and opposing principles. In addition to empathy and self-expression, the word

¹⁸⁸Heschel, Quest for God, 15, 13.

¹⁸⁹Heschel, "Jewish Theology," in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 161.

¹⁹⁰Heschel, "On Prayer," in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 261.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*, 12.

and that which is beyond words, mentioned above, he lists order and outburst, regularity and spontaneity, uniformity and individuality, law and freedom, a duty and a prerogative, creed and faith, the joy and celebration represented by the Baal Shem Tov and the solemnity and demand embodied in the Kotzker, and individual worship and community worship.¹⁹² Heschel has a love and appreciation for both *halacha* (law) and *aggadah* (inwardness), *keva* (literally, fixed things: fixed time, fixed ways, fixed texts) and *kavanah* (inner devotion), tradition and freedom in prayer and believes they must interact. Having argued forcefully for holding the tension of opposites and the value of reciprocity, Heschel believes that when it comes to prayer, at least theoretically, the most essential dimension is *kavanah*, inner participation. He quotes Maimonides: "Prayer without *kavanah* is no prayer at all."¹⁹³ As we will see, inner participation leads to outward deeds. Both insure that our prayer is true.

Seventh, unlike speech whose aim it is to inform, Heschel insists, the purpose of prayer is *to partake*, to participate in the eternal drama with reverence and praise, with radical amazement and personal, human concern.¹⁹⁴ It bears repeating that unlike the widespread notion and practice (in Judaism and Christianity) that reduces prayer primarily to petition, Heschel contends that prayer begins in praise. As such, prayer is faith expressed simultaneously as humility and nobility. It means both to stand before God and to see the world from God's point of view. Existential humility causes us to taste and see everything from the position of awe and indebtedness which give way to

¹⁹²Ibid., 64-65, 45.

¹⁹³Ibid., 66.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 16.

thanks and praise. Nobility prompts us “to dream in league with God, to envision his holy visions,” to make God’s concerns our concerns, and to respond affirmatively to the invitation to be the partner of God.¹⁹⁵

Heschel grounds the divine-human partnership in God’s most passionate desire: to be known by human beings as personal, immediate concern *and humankind’s secret longing: to be a need of God*. Heschel imbues the *Shekinah* with pathos, thus prayer (along with *mitzvot*) is the primary way of making a personal response to this personal concern. In other words, because for Heschel faith is reciprocal, prayer presumes not just presence but presences: the passionate presence of God and the intentional presence of humans.

What then do conscientious people of faith do with the absence of God, apparent or real? If God can ask of humans, “Where are you?,” are humans, if not entitled, at least sensible to ask of God, “Where are You?” Are not divine glory and the response called prayer in conflict with the magnitude of human cruelty, suffering, and evil in the world? Heschel responds to these queries by drawing on the Kabbalistic-Hasidic principle of divine exile. Put succinctly, God is not at home in the universe because God’s will has been so commonly disregarded. As mentioned above, it is not just that God is in exile, but more to the point, that God *has been exiled*, expelled, cast out. Mindful, on the one hand, of the Holocaust and other human atrocities, and on the other hand, of the reciprocal nature of faith, “the growing awareness of history’s tragic predicament gives birth to an intuition that man was responsible for God as God was responsible for

¹⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 19.

man.”¹⁹⁶ Sadly, Heschel quips, “It is as easy to expel God as it is to shed blood.”¹⁹⁷

Heschel concludes the soundest explanation for God’s hiding is actually humankind’s prior hiding. He reminds, “Man was the first to hide himself from God . . . and is still hiding.”¹⁹⁸

Facing squarely the “mendacity and violence” caused by humans intent on ousting “the Lord from his world,” acknowledging the accusations and tacit queries, “Where is God?,” “Why does [God] keep silent?” “Why does [God] permit iniquity to flourish?” Heschel insists:

Going beyond all speculation as how to reconcile the belief in Divine Providence with the immense torrents of madness and atrocities, our concern is not to find an apology for God but, rather, to put an end to evil, an end to the epilepsy of God’s presence.¹⁹⁹

Therefore, the privilege and responsibility of the pray-er increases, for according to Heschel,

To pray means to bring God back into the world, to establish His kingship for a second at least. To pray means to expand His presence . . . To worship, therefore, means to make God immanent, to make Him present. His being immanent in the world depends upon us.²⁰⁰

The best way to prevent divine absence is to assure human presence. If humans have a vital say in the eviction of God on account of their ignominious behavior, then they also have a genuine say in God’s return through living lives commensurate with being an

¹⁹⁶Heschel, Passion for Truth, 298.

¹⁹⁷Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 145.

¹⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁹⁹Heschel, Passion for Truth, 299.

²⁰⁰Heschel, “Prayer as Discipline,” in Insecurity of Freedom, 258.

image of God. Heschel quips, “God is less rare than we think; when we long for Him, His distance crumbles away.”²⁰¹ Thus, there is an integral relationship between prayer understood as being known by God and prayer understood as making God known in the world, between prayer viewed as “an act of appreciation of being able to stand in the presence of God” and holy deeds viewed as a way of making God present in and for the world.²⁰²

For Heschel, the essence of spiritual living is found in the unity of faith and action. Inward devotion generates external deeds, which in turn, reform and rejuvenate inward devotion. “Faith is but a seed, while the deed is its growth and decay.”²⁰³ The human vocation is realized to the extent that the kernel of faith cultivated by prayer produces a harvest of holy action. What begins in praise (concerning ourselves with what concerns God), is nurtured in *mitzvot* (acting on what concerns God), sustained in *mishpat* (doing justice) and ends in *tikkun ha olam* (healing the universe). Let us turn now to our final pair of transcendental themes: divine pathos and human sympathy.

²⁰¹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 153.

²⁰²Heschel, Quest for God, 84.

²⁰³*Ibid.*, 110.

CHAPTER 6

DIVINE PATHOS AND HUMAN SYMPATHY

What we have seen thus far is that the content of what persons apprehend elicits a particular response. Just as wonder is the fitting reply to the ineffable, awe the proper reaction to transcendent mystery, and faith the apposite answer to the presence or glory of God, so too sympathy is the appropriate response to divine *pathos*. The final ingredient, then, in Rabbi Heschel's understanding of authentic living is human sympathy in response to divine pathos.

In this chapter I will examine the concept of divine pathos central to Heschel's understanding of God and religious existence. Since, according to Heschel, it is the prophets of Israel who most intensely experience and respond to divine pathos, we will look to them to guide us in our understanding of this intimate divine-human relationship. They will illuminate both divine pathos and its most appropriate human response: sympathy.

Divine Pathos and the Prophetic Consciousness

Abraham Heschel's early study of the biblical prophets, first in the form of his doctoral dissertation and then later published in 1962 as his seminal and monumental book, The Prophets, influenced the nature of his scholarly work, inspired the constancy of his ethical vision, and instigated the compassionate and courageous public actions he

took in human affairs. In this tour de force Heschel offers not simply a book about the prophets but rather “a Jewish view of things,” for he believes that “the prophetic consciousness accentuates what is central to this view.”¹ A thorough study of this work and other of his writings and talks clearly shows that Heschel’s theology of pathos represents his deepest personal conviction about God, and, many believe, his single most distinctive and significant theological contribution. As mentioned previously, Heschel believes that the theme of God in search of humanity is the summary of Jewish theology. More specifically, the pathos of God (and the consequent implications) is the central idea of prophetic theology and the linchpin of Heschel’s entire theological opus. Heschel scholar, John Merkle goes so far as to say that Heschel’s doctrine of divine pathos is “not simply original but indeed revolutionary.”²

However original, radical, or ground-breaking this theological assertion, for Heschel it is rooted in and the logical extension of what he believes is *the* fundamental statement about God as revealed in the Bible and espoused in Judaism: “*God is in search of man.*”³ Not only is this the central claim about God but as a result “it is the fundamental statement in the inner life of a human being in relation to God in the world.”⁴

¹Heschel, Prophets, 156.

²John Merkle, “Heschel’s Theology of Divine Pathos,” in Exploring His Life, 66. Others seem to agree. A representative comment is that of Maurice Friedman who said Heschel’s theology of pathos “is one of the most significant original contributions to biblical thought in our times.” Friedman, You Are My Witnesses, 66. Although in one sense it is not incorrect to say Heschel’s construction of divine pathos is “original,” it also should be noted that the idea of divine passibility is not foreign to Jewish mysticism.

³ Heschel, “Jewish Theology,” in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 160. Heschel claims that divine pathos permeates rabbinic literature and post-rabbinic thought in Judaism. This article is based on a talk that Rabbi Heschel gave to the Solomon Schechter School principals in New York at their conference in May 1968.

⁴*Ibid.*, 158.

In other words, divine pathos conveys something unique about both God and humanity. This becomes clear when we see that fundamental to Heschel's theology of pathos is the conviction that revelation, epitomized in the revelational character of the Bible, is not unidirectional and monological but rather mutual and relational.⁵ The Bible, for Heschel, is not merely the word of God. "[I]t is the word of God *and* man; a record of both revelation and response; the drama of covenant between God and man."⁶ In order for revelation to occur, both God and humankind are necessary. He explains:

Even in the moment of the [revelational] event, the [person] is . . . an active partner in the event. His response to what is disclosed to him turns revelation into a dialogue. In a sense, prophecy consists of a revelation of God and a *co-revelation* of man.⁷

So, for example, Heschel points out that the giving of the Torah at Sinai

was both an event in the life of God and an event in the life of man. . . . God was alone in the world until Israel became engaged to Him. At Sinai God revealed His word, and Israel revealed the power to respond.⁸

Whereas the glory of God in this world, as dealt with in the last chapter, refers to the omnipresence of God, pathos refers to the specifically revealed and special presence of God.⁹ To be more precise, it signals the *revealed relationship* between God and human beings, between God and history, history viewed as consisting mainly of events. For Heschel, revelation is an event and not a process. He believes transitive concern is an essential attribute of God, not a "continuous revelation." Whereas a process is typical,

⁵We saw this in the previous chapter when discussing the reciprocal nature of faith.

⁶Heschel, God in Search of Man, 260-61.

⁷*Ibid.*, 260.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 116.

often continuous and steady, and occurs in nature, he points out events are unique, irregular, intermittent, and what constitute history. A process tends to follow a relatively permanent pattern, an event sets a precedent. Most especially, he points out that although it is possible for there to be historical processes, that is, events-in-process, the fundamental difference is that a natural process does not include freedom, decision, and responsibility whereas historical events and events-in-process do.¹⁰ It is in this context, viewing revelation as an event, that we need to understand pathos both as a free act of divine will, and as the particular revelation and poignant expression of God's presence in and concern for the world.

Before considering pathos from the perspective of the prophet's experience, it will be helpful first to consider it over-against classical theism as influenced by Greek philosophy.

The Predilection for the Apathic God

In actual fact, Heschel reminds, in comparison to the number of times such concepts as goodness, justice, wisdom, or unity appear in biblical reference to God, statements referring to God's pathos appear more frequently.¹¹ Heschel argues that although pathos is central to the biblical image of God, in actuality Jewish and Christian theologians for the past two thousand years have acted embarrassed by the constant references in the Bible to divine pathos. As a result, it has been neglected in biblical theology.¹² Heschel traces the noticeable inattention to and seeming discomfort with the

¹⁰Ibid., 114.

¹¹Heschel, Prophets, 286.

¹²Ibid.

theme of divine pathos in theology to certain philosophical presuppositions whose origins lie in classical Greek thought. In particular, it was the concepts of impassibility and immutability and the philosophical allegiance to them by theologians that made divine pathos appear unreasonable. The former refers to the belief that God is immoveable, constant, incompatible with change. The latter points to the conviction that the divine is unaffected, unmoved by external reality, and immune to otherness.

The word, pathos, like its Latin equivalent *passio*, from *pati* (to suffer), refers to the capacity to be acted upon. Pathos and passibility denote the state or condition of being affected by, that is, to “suffer action.” As opposed to an abiding condition, pathos denotes something happening based on something outside of oneself. In ancient times it is applied to emotions both of pleasure and pain as well as to the passions which are considered states of the soul aroused by some force outside the self and thus comparable to the relation of cause and effect. Because it connotes being the passive victim or dependent recipient of some agent or action or emotion it is viewed as a weakness.¹³

Thus, Heschel maintains that the static idea of divinity is the outcome of two strands of thought: the ontological notion of stability and the psychological view of the emotions as disturbances of the soul.¹⁴ In Greek philosophy, the idea of passibility presumes potentiality. In Aristotelian metaphysics, for example, all change is regarded as the passage from potentiality to actuality. To say something or someone has potential is to suggest that there is possibility that is not yet realized. In order for potential to be realized something must happen, there must be movement from potentiality to reality or,

¹³Ibid., 319, 334.

¹⁴Ibid., 335.

as in the case of loss, from actuality to potentiality. Potentiality implies change. Change, in turn, is considered less perfect than the changeless.¹⁵ To be perfect is to be unchanging, actualized, eternal. The Deity, considered perfect, “remaining absolutely and forever in its own form,” is necessarily unaffected by anything, and therefore immutable.¹⁶ Classical theism subscribes to the philosophical assumption that the passive principle is one of the features that distinguishes matter from the Deity. The early Greeks, beginning with Xenophanes, then explicated and developed by such thinkers as Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Philo, and others, as well as by the medieval Jewish philosopher, Maimonides, and the Catholic scholastic philosopher and theologian, Thomas Aquinas, all maintained that whereas it is the characteristic of matter to suffer action, it is not the characteristic of absolute being or the divine.¹⁷ In other words, there is no potentiality in God, only actuality. Since God is viewed as *actus purus*, pure actuality or the fullness of being, God is by nature unmoved and unchangeable. There is no possibility or necessity for movement in God for God possesses no unrealized potentiality. Thus, to be susceptible to pathos “would contradict the transcendence, independence, and absoluteness of the Supreme Being.”¹⁸

Intimately related to the view of divine immutability is the Greek conception of God as the First Cause “that started the world’s mechanism working, and which

¹⁵Van A. Harvey A Handbook of Theological Terms (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1964), 129.

¹⁶Heschel, Prophets, 334.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 334-37.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 334.

continues to function according to its own inherent laws and process.”¹⁹ Because such a Deity is conceived of as being utterly sufficient and never in need of anything, it is inconceivable that such a Supreme Being, one that precedes all and moves all but is unable to be moved, would be involved in the affairs of human existence.²⁰ Heschel summarizes Aristotle’s view this way:

[A] god needing nothing, will not need a friend, nor have one. A self-sufficient being whose perfection is beyond all possibility of enhancement and diminution could not be in need of any being not itself.²¹

It is due to this Aristotelian perspective, Heschel argues, whereby the Deity is “the unmoved mover, pure form, eternal, wholly actual, immutable, immovable, self-sufficient, and wholly separated from all else,” that

[p]hilosophical theologians have maintained . . . that while man is dependent upon the Supreme Being, the Supreme Being has no need of man, standing aloof from the affairs of man. Religion is a monologue, pure theotropism.²²

This philosophical position that exalts divine immutability and indifference, Heschel insists, as we will see later, is antithetical to the biblical and prophetic understanding of God.

In addition to the ontological predisposition toward pure being as opposed to becoming, Heschel maintains that the Greek disparagement of emotion is also responsible for bringing about the non-biblical view of an immutable and impassible Deity. Although they disagree in their understanding of the human soul (Plato divides it into the

¹⁹Ibid., 299.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 302.

²²Ibid.

impulsive, appetitive, and rational while Aristotle argues for the soul's unity), both consider knowledge to be the highest virtue, understanding the emotions to be, at best, auxiliaries, and, at worst, impediments to the rational form of life.²³ In this view, passions are not so much bad as neutral, requiring proper attention and training in order for them to be channeled toward ethical behavior.²⁴

Heschel contends that one aspect of Plato's philosophy, namely his view of the duality of the human person, one part reaching upward to the divine and the other being pulled down toward the contamination of the flesh, unfortunately became the prevalent view. The Platonic conception of the human being depicts the soul as a two-level house with reason being on the highest level and the emotions dwelling on the lower level. Emotions, viewed as unruly, fleshy, and the source of disaster, are considered to be part of the human person's animal nature, whereas reason, conceived as order, light, and the power that elevates human beings above the animalistic, is understood as the divine dimension of humanity. Heschel believes, "It was such preference that enabled Greek philosophy to exclude all emotion from the nature of the Deity, while at the same time ascribing thought and contemplation to it."²⁵ Heschel captures the thrust of the doctrine of *apatheia* (that is, the absence or indifference to feeling and passion) in this statement:

The perfect example of an impassive deity is the God of Aristotle. By identifying the Deity with the First Cause, with something which, while it has the capacity of moving all things, is itself unmoved, Aristotle's Deity has no pathos, no needs. Ever resting in itself, its only activity is thinking, and its thinking is thinking of thinking. Indifferent to all things, it does not care to contemplate anything but itself. Things long for it and thus are set

²³Ibid., 321.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 322-23.

in motion, yet they are left to themselves.²⁶

According to this reasoning, God is above even acts of justice, since “the circumstances of action are trivial and unworthy of God.” No virtues are ascribed to the Deity. God is reduced to *nous* or the Mind of the cosmos, and as is the case for Plato, thinking becomes the essence of divine being. The Deity is above joy and sorrow. Pure acting is not action but thinking.²⁷

Even more extreme views than that of Plato developed and lead to the following notion about emotions described here by Heschel:

It is not enough to control them. They must be completely eradicated, for it is easier to destroy them than to keep them in check. True virtue can exist only where emotions are no more. The wise man must strive to attain *apatheia*, the complete freedom from emotions. He must be emotionless, never yielding to anger, never knowing fear or pity.²⁸

Thought regarding the emotions by Greek philosophers fluctuates from a view whereby reason controls impulses to the ethical postulate of Zeno who calls for “the complete effacement of emotion and passion.”²⁹

Since for the Greeks, human happiness is measured by serenity and the absence of worry, which can only be attained by *ataraxia*, that is, by living apart from and uninvolved in the world, politics, and affairs, it is easy to see how these same characteristics are transferred to the Deity who is considered to be complete tranquility and perfect peace. Such a disparagement of the emotions in human life, as well as the

²⁶Ibid., 323.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 326.

²⁹Ibid., 327.

exaltation of existence without cares, are transferred to the Greek view of the Deity as apathic.

To sum up, the Greek philosophy embraced by philosophical theologians stresses the concept of being over becoming. Denigrating emotion and lauding divine indifference, the classical ideal of the Greeks is attaining the state of inner harmony and *apatheia*. The Deity represents the highest expression of true being, is considered Actualized or Absolute Being, and is viewed as the *primum movens immobile*: “eternal and immovable, impassive and unalterable.”³⁰ The philosophical premises above adopted by Jewish and Christian scholastics of the Middle Ages lead to the conviction that divine perfection implies absolute immutability thus excluding pathos and resulting in the conception of a static, apathic God.

Heschel asserts that biblical thinking stands in sharp contrast to the Hellenistic understanding of human existence, the emotional life of the human person, and the concept of the divine. For starters, whereas Greek philosophy begins with being and considers it the ultimate reality, biblical consciousness begins with the surprise of being, realizes the contingency of being, and understands God as ultimate. Unlike Greek philosophy, Heschel maintains theology “dares to go behind being in asking about the source of being.” He states:

[W]hile ontology asks about *being as being*, theology asks about *being in creation*, about being as a divine act. From the perspective of continuous creation, there is no being as being; there is only continuous coming-into-being. Being is both action and event.³¹

³⁰Ibid., 326.

³¹Ibid., 339.

About these different ontological perspectives, Heschel continues:

Biblical ontology does not separate being from doing. What *is*, acts. The God of Israel is a God who acts, a God of mighty deeds. The Bible does not say how He is, but how He acts. It speaks of His acts of pathos and of His acts in history; it is not as “true being” that God is conceived, but as the *semper agens*. Here the basic category is action rather than immobility. Movement, creation of nature, acts within history rather than absolute transcendence and detachment from the events of history, are the attributes of the Supreme Being.³²

Whereas Greek philosophy focuses on being as being and speculation is concerned with the cosmos, the prophets, who represent for Heschel the biblical vision, are concerned with history which is the sphere of contingency and change, and is understood as a dynamic drama that includes unique, lasting and significant events.³³

As opposed to the Greek view of the emotions, Heschel points out:

the Bible [does not] share the view that passions are disturbances or weaknesses of the soul, and much less the premise that passion itself is evil, that passion as such is incompatible with right thinking or right living.³⁴

Heschel stresses that the biblical perspective neither celebrates apathy nor denigrates the emotions. He maintains that the demeaning of emotion grows out of the idea that the rational, higher level of the human person holds a power of sovereignty over any object of its comprehension which by nature is inherently passive. Heschel contends this is a misconception. He explains:

[T]he act of thinking of an object is in itself an act of being moved by the object. In thinking we do not create an object; we are challenged by it. Thus, thought is part of emotion. We think because we are moved, a fact of which we are not always conscious. Emotion may be defined as the

³²Ibid., 339-40.

³³Ibid., 340.

³⁴Ibid., 331.

consciousness of being moved.³⁵

Heschel points out that one of the root meanings of the word *ruah* (often rendered spirit, breath, wind) is pathos. Thus, he claims that it is also unbiblical to think that emotion or passion can be separated from spirit. According to Heschel, emotion and being filled with the spirit are intimately related since both refer to a state of being moved.³⁶

Heschel also explains that the Bible does not recommend the negation of the desires and passions, for it is not the throbbing heart but the hard heart that is the source of evil. He indicates that not only does the Bible not call for the effacement of the emotions, it frequently regards them as inspired by and reflections of a higher power. Thus, the Bible affirms the centrality of pathos, emotional involvement, and passionate participation in religious existence. Passion is regarded as a motive force, an incentive that inspires great deeds.³⁷ Whereas, for example, the Stoics consider apathy to be the ideal state of the sage, the ideal state for the prophet is sympathy for God. Again, this is on account of the fact that while “the Greeks attributed to the gods the state of happiness and serenity[,] the prophets thought of God ‘s relations to the world as one of concern and compassion.”³⁸ Thus, Heschel maintains:

In the light of such affirmation, with no stigma attached to pathos, there was no reason to shun the idea of pathos in the understanding of God. Pathos implied no inner bondage, no enslavement to impulse, no subjugation by passion, but a willed, transitive feeling which existed in relation to man. An apathetic and ascetic God would have struck biblical man with a sense, not of dignity and grandeur, but rather of poverty and

³⁵Ibid., 405.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., 332.

³⁸Ibid.

emptiness. Only through arbitrary allegorizing was later religious philosophy able to find an apathetic God in the Bible.³⁹

Heschel claims, for the prophets, as opposed to the Greeks, the most exalted idea applied to God is not infinite tranquility or wisdom or power, it is infinite concern.⁴⁰ Fritz Rothschild's poignant characterization of Heschel's position sums up best Heschel's response to the notion of God's impassibility: "The pathetic God as distinguished from the God of Aristotle is not the Unmoved Mover but the Most Moved Mover."⁴¹ Rothschild's pithy phrase captures well the central theme of Heschel's writings. Not only is God not static or unchanging but acting and moving. Not only is God not stoic and unconcerned but engaged in and affected by human history and experience.

Heschel maintains that a major reason for the rejection of the idea of pathos is due to the fear of anthropomorphism, that is, the endowment of God with human attributes. For Greeks, the aversion was first a reaction to certain conceptions that they found morally offensive and thus repulsive when associated with the very nature of the gods, for example, jealousy, envy, theft, and deception.⁴² In addition, religious thinkers denounced the attribution of a body or limbs to the Deity. Attributions of emotions or passion to the Supreme Being were equally resisted.

To these concerns, Heschel responds that it is not only an oversimplification but an affront to assume, for example, that the prophets are merely attempting to invest God

³⁹Ibid., 332-33.

⁴⁰Ibid., 310.

⁴¹Rothschild, Between God and Man, 25.

⁴²Ibid., 344, 345.

with human qualities: "Merely to personify God would have been to disparage Him."⁴³

Heschel emphasizes:

The idea of divine pathos is not a personification of God but an exemplification of divine reality, an illustration or illumination of His concern. It does not represent a substance, but an act or a relationship.⁴⁴

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explicate in detail Heschel's argument over against the charge of anthropomorphism.⁴⁵ However, the following paragraphs encapsulate his response to this criticism and express the essence of his position:

The idea of the divine pathos combining absolute selflessness with supreme concern for the poor and the exploited can hardly be regarded as the attribution of human characteristics. Where is the man who is endowed with such characteristics? Nowhere in the Bible is man characterized as merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abundant in love and truth, keeping love to the thousandth generation. Pathos is a thought that bears a resemblance to an aspect of divine reality as related to the world of man. As a theological category, it is a genuine insight into God's relatedness to man, rather than a projection of human traits into divinity, as found for example in the god images of mythology.

... Absolute selflessness and mysteriously undeserved love are more akin to the divine than to the human. And if these are characteristics of human nature, then man is endowed with attributes of the divine.

God's unconditional concern for justice is not an anthropomorphism. Rather, man's concern for justice is a theomorphism.⁴⁶

He emphasizes this last comparison elsewhere as he states:

Man's sense of injustice is a poor analogy to God's sense of injustice. The exploitation of the poor is to us a misdemeanor; to God, it is a disaster. Our reaction is disapproval; God's reaction is something no language can convey.⁴⁷

⁴³Ibid., 346.

⁴⁴Ibid., 351.

⁴⁵For an analysis of Heschel's view of divine pathos over against the contention of anthropomorphism, see Merkle, "Heschel's Theology of Divine Pathos," in *Exploring His Life*, 66-83.

⁴⁶Heschel, *Prophets*, 348-49.

⁴⁷Ibid., 365.

Heschel's assertion is that the biblical view calls not for God to be thought of in analogy to human beings but rather for humans to be conceived of in analogy to God. More so, humans are to be brought into such an analogy not merely by thought but in and through concrete emotional and ethical involvement.⁴⁸

The Prophetic Consciousness

In response to the ontological and psychological objections to divine pathos rooted in Greek philosophy, Heschel offers a theology of pathos based on the biblical perspective of the prophets. According to Heschel, pathos is not so much an ontological or psychological category as it is a theological reality, claiming that it is as central to the biblical idea of history as the idea that humans are the image of God is to the understanding of creation.⁴⁹ He believes that "the fundamental feature of divine reality, present in the prophet's consciousness," is divine pathos, and that, simply stated, in comparison to Greek metaphysics the doctrine of pathos is "a more plausible view of ultimate reality."⁵⁰ For Heschel, pathos is the most vivid expression of divine concern, "an explication of the idea of God in search of man."⁵¹

As mentioned in a previous chapter, Heschel maintains that persons sense the presence of God in three primary ways: in and through the world, in and through sacred

⁴⁸Sherman, Promise of Heschel, 35.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 292

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 393, 318.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 160.

deeds, and in and through the Bible.⁵² In the Bible, according to Heschel, the prophet holds a privileged place and in a unique and particular way it is through the prophet that we encounter the God of pathos. About the prophets, he writes, "Together with receptivity to the word of God they were endowed with a receptivity to the presence of God."⁵³ Heschel maintains no one has ever taken God and the human person as seriously as does the biblical prophet. The prophet stands as the epitome of the human person in total awareness of and in intimate relationship with God. What concerns God consumes the prophet. "The prophet is a man who feels fiercely," says Heschel.⁵⁴ Therefore, it is the prophet's consciousness and experience through which Heschel invites Jews and others to understand God and to see humankind's situation in the world.

It is the prophets' receptivity and acute sensitivity that enables them to fulfill their unique mission and task. "The prophet's task is to convey a divine perspective" which results in the disclosure of the prophet's understanding of God.⁵⁵ As the figure most sensitive to the passionate concern of God and responsive to God's desire to be in relationship, the prophet is involved in an "*exegesis of existence from a divine perspective*."⁵⁶ The prophet simultaneously reveals the attitudes and perspective of God and discloses the meaning of being human. The prophet does not have a general idea or abstract theory about God, but an *understanding* rooted in the experience of living as a

⁵²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 31, 311.

⁵³Heschel, Prophets, 286.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, xxvii.

witness, grasped by the immediacy of God. "To the prophet, knowledge of God was fellowship with Him," says Heschel, "not attained by syllogism, analysis or induction, but by living together."⁵⁷ Heschel emphasizes:

[The prophets'] God-understanding was not the result of a theoretical inquiry, of a groping in the midst of alternatives about the being and attributes of God. To the prophets, God was overwhelmingly real and shatteringly present.⁵⁸

At the heart of Heschel's understanding of God and the divine-human relationship is the conviction that God is living care and passionate lover. He writes:

The God of Israel is a God Who loves, a God Who is known to, and concerned with man. He not only rules the world in the majesty of His might and wisdom, but reacts intimately, to the events of history. He does not judge men's deeds impassively and with aloofness; His judgment is imbued with the attitude of One to Whom those actions are of the most intimate and profound concern. God does not stand outside the range of human suffering and sorrow. He is personally involved in, even stirred by, the conduct and fate of man.⁵⁹

For the prophets, Heschel asserts, God "is not the Wholly Other, a strange, weird, uncanny Being," distant, aloof, "shrouded in unfathomable darkness," and impervious to the human situation. God is the God of the covenant, the One who draws close, is involved and concerned."⁶⁰ In particular, Heschel argues:

To the prophet . . . God does not reveal Himself in an abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world. He does not simply command and expect obedience; He is also moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath. He is not conceived as judging the world in detachment. He reacts in an intimate and subjective manner, and thus determines the value of events. Quite obviously in the biblical view, man's deeds may move Him, affect Him, grieve Him or, on the other hand, gladden and please Him. This notion that

⁵⁷Ibid., 288.

⁵⁸Ibid., 285.

⁵⁹Ibid., 289.

⁶⁰Ibid., 292.

God can be intimately affected, that He possesses not merely intelligence and will, but also pathos, basically defines the prophetic consciousness of God.⁶¹

Although, for Heschel, pathos is seen most acutely in God's involvement in human suffering, in point of fact pathos refers to the total yet intimate relatedness of God to humanity. Pathos, in other words, does not refer solely to God's anguish but rather to God willingly and knowingly being moved and affected by human persons, by the human situation, and by human history. Therefore, pathos, expressive of divine involvement, is inclusive of joy, love, concern, and compassion as well as of anger, sorrow, justice, and suffering. Heschel stresses that the prophets neither conceive of pathos as an uncontrolled passion nor as an automatic divine reaction caused by human actions. Divine pathos is not the result of "unreasoned emotion" on the part of God nor necessitated by human behavior. For Heschel, "the decisive fact is that of divine freedom."⁶² It is "an act formed with intention, depending on free will, the result of decision and determination."⁶³ Pathos is not an "emotional convulsion" but rather the deliberate and passionate movement of the divine toward the universe and toward humanity.

Just as becoming human is not a given but an intentional, ongoing drama, there is a sense in Heschel's thought that implies pathos is the *becoming* of God. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that pathos itself is continually *becoming* in God. It is not that God's *essence* is ambiguous, unresolved, yet to be determined, or constantly fluctuating. Instead pathos vividly expresses the current and continually unfolding relatedness of God to the world. In other words, divine pathos itself is not predetermined, not a given, "not an

⁶¹Ibid., 288-89

⁶²Ibid., 290.

⁶³Ibid.

absolute force that exists regardless of man, something ultimate or eternal” but rather an ongoing moment in the will of God.⁶⁴ Heschel clarifies: “pathos . . . is rather a reaction to human history, an attitude called forth by man’s conduct; a response, not a cause.”⁶⁵

Thus, divine pathos signals not only the capacity and openness to be moved but also the intention to act, to be involved. Again, Heschel stresses that what the prophets experience when they experience the pathos of God is not the *essence* of God. Yet, the pathos that the prophets sense and proclaim is nothing less than “God’s intimate relatedness to man.”⁶⁶

Not only is this passionate movement of God toward the world and humanity not arbitrary, “a sort of fever of the mind” culminating “in irrational and irresponsible behavior,” it is always just. The movement of God’s heart necessarily joins pathos and ethos. Heschel states:

It is because God is the source of justice that His pathos is ethical; and it is because God is absolutely personal—devoid of anything impersonal—that this ethos is full of pathos.

. . . Ethos is inherent in pathos. God is concerned about the world, and shares its fate. Indeed, this is the essence of God’s moral nature: His willingness to be intimately involved in the history of man.⁶⁷

Pathos is an intimate response occasioned by God’s concern about the world and indicating God’s willingness and desire not only to participate in the human predicament but to make it God’s own situation. Heschel makes it clear, “Pathos is a relative state, it

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid., 280.

⁶⁷Ibid., 290-91.

always refers to humanity; it is a reaction to what happens within the life of humanity.”⁶⁸

He explains:

Man is not only an image of God; he is a personal concern of God. The idea of pathos adds a dimension to human existence. Whatever man does affects not only his own life, but also the life of God insofar as it is directed to man. The import of man raises him beyond the level of mere creature. He is a consort, a partner, a factor in the life of God.⁶⁹

Pathos is not an attribute of God but a situation, a dynamic modality, and a dynamic relation between God and humankind.⁷⁰ As the definitive expression of God’s turning toward humanity, pathos is a revelation about both God and human persons. It is not, then, a psychological category but a theological reality signifying God’s free, passionate, and concerned investment in history. Pathos “is like a bridge over the abyss that separates man from God.”⁷¹ A more “personal” name for this bridge between God and humanity is *covenant*. Heschel emphasizes the central place of covenant in biblical theology. He explains:

Before the Torah, the covenant was.

In contrast to our civilization, the Hebrews lived in a world of the covenant rather than in a world of contracts. The idea of contract was unknown to them. The God of Israel ‘cares as little for contract and the cash nexus as He cares for mere slavish obedience and obsequiousness. His chosen sphere is that of covenant.’ His relationship to His partner is one of benevolence and affection. . . .

Prophecy is a reminder that what obtains between God and man is not a contract but a covenant. Anterior to the covenant is love, the love of the fathers (Deut. 4:37; 10:15), and what obtains between God and Israel must be understood, not as a legal, but as a personal relationship, as participation, involvement, tension. God’s life interacts with the life of the people. To live in the

⁶⁸Ibid., 411.

⁶⁹Ibid., 292.

⁷⁰Ibid., 290, 289, 296.

⁷¹Ibid., 295.

covenant is to partake of the fellowship of God and His people.⁷²

Heschel points out that as important as the idea of covenant is, of “establishing a reciprocal relation between God and man,” it is the idea of divine pathos that saves it from rigid legalism. As opposed to a deadening juridicism that lacks life and creativity, “pathos . . . implies a constant concern and involvement; it is conceived of as an emotional engagement” offering “a multiplicity of forms of relationships” between God and people.”⁷³ To say that pathos is the unique factor that makes covenant wholly different from contract is to say that love is at the heart of the former whereas legality is the cornerstone of the latter. Heschel states:

God does not judge the deeds of man impassively, in a spirit of cool detachment. His judgment is imbued with a feeling of intimate concern. He is the father of all men, not only a judge; He is a lover engaged to His people, not only a king. God stands in a passionate relationship to man. His love or anger, His mercy or disappointment is an expression of His profound participation in the history of Israel and all men.⁷⁴

Motivated by pathos, covenant conveys the generous nature of God’s heart and the specific trajectory of God’s loving care. Unlike the egotistic, self-centered gods of mythology, the God of the covenant is other-oriented, never self-centered. Thus, divine pathos is inherently transitive.

Pathos does not exhaust *who God is* but represents most fully *how God acts* in the covenantal relationship: freely and emotionally engaged, compassionately involved and intimately affected, creatively responsive and ethically motivated. Again, for Heschel, it

⁷²Ibid., 296-97.

⁷³Ibid., 297.

⁷⁴Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 244.

is this partnership between God and humans that makes human life holy.⁷⁵ This divine-human partnership, this relationship of reciprocity characterized by the interaction between presence and faith, pathos and sympathy, divine command and human response, is the milieu where human becoming occurs.

By way of summary, Heschel states the essential features of divine pathos. He writes:

[D]ivine pathos is not conceived of as an essential attribute of God, as something objective, as a finality with which man is confronted, but as an expression of God's will; it is a functional rather than a substantial reality; not an attribute, not an unchangeable quality, not an absolute content of divine Being, but rather a situation or the personal implication in His acts.

It is not a passion, an unreasoned emotion, but an act formed with intention, rooted in decision and determination; not an attitude taken arbitrarily, but one charged with ethos; not a reflexive, but a transitive act. . . . [I]ts essential meaning is not to be seen in its psychological denotation . . . but in its theological connotation, signifying God as involved in history, as intimately affected by events in history, as living care.⁷⁶

For the prophets, pathos is the basis and the fullest expression of the passionate covenant between God and humans. Pathos is the original motive force in the dynamic relation between God and humankind. It is the initiating and responsive movement of God toward the human partner. Other than being called the sacred image of God, there is no greater moniker for the human person than *the partner of God* as ascribed to them by Heschel via the prophets.

Prophetic Consciousness and Human Sympathy

According to Heschel, the biblical prophets are no mere fortune-tellers,

⁷⁵Ibid., 242.

⁷⁶Ibid., 298.

doomsayers, or robotic mouthpieces of the divine. The prophets are persons, not instruments. More than messengers, they are witnesses to God's presence. Heschel insists, "There are no proofs for the existence of the God of Abraham. There are only witnesses."⁷⁷ Their vocation is oriented toward the present pathos of God not foreknowledge of the future. As those acutely open and responsive to the concern of God, possessing an insight into the divine pathos, prophets are consequently the ones who dream in league with God, envisioning God's holy visions, proclaiming the pathos to the people, and acting as symbols of God by enacting divine concern.⁷⁸ Heschel explains:

To the prophet, the pathos is the predominant and staggering aspect in what he encounters. . . . The inner personal identification of the prophet with the divine pathos is, as we have shown, the central feature of his own life. . . . The mode of divine involvement is the focal point in his religious consciousness.⁷⁹

Above all else, the prophets are the partners and associates of God who are informed, formed, and transformed by an inner identification with God's will and concern. Acting on this emotional and intimate communion with God, they come to see life and the world from a divine perspective and then endeavor to bring the world into divine focus for others.⁸⁰

In prophetic religion, sympathy is the appropriate and conscious response to divine pathos. It signals the human beings' emotional and spiritual reciprocation of the divine partner's initiative. Heschel stresses that it is only because of God's pathos—

⁷⁷Ibid., 27.

⁷⁸Heschel, Quest for God, 19; Heschel, Prophets, 394.

⁷⁹Heschel, Prophets, 394.

⁸⁰Ibid., 29.

concern for the world—that faith is even possible, let alone sensible. Unlike the Protestant theologian, Paul Tillich, who speaks of religion as “ultimate concern,” Heschel considers the chief characteristic of biblical or prophetic religion to be concern for what concerns God.⁸¹ Heschel claims religion is not what persons do with their ultimate concern but what they do with God’s ultimate concern.⁸² About the prophet, Heschel states:

The divine pathos is reflected in [the prophet’s] attitudes, hopes, and prayers. The prophet is stirred by an intimate concern for the divine concern. Sympathy, then, is the essential mode in which he responds to the divine situation.⁸³

Heschel chooses the word sympathy over empathy in his explication of the prophetic consciousness and engagement in life.⁸⁴ He maintains that whereas empathy “denotes living the situation of another person,” sympathy means “*living with* another person.”⁸⁵ He seems to make this distinction based on a strict etymological translation of

⁸¹Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 12. For Tillich, God is the human person’s ultimate concern whereas for Heschel, the human person is God’s ultimate concern.

⁸²Heschel, *Prophets*, 619.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 394.

⁸⁴In his study on the prophets, Heschel frequently uses the term “prophetic sympathy.” Elsewhere in the same text, he uses the term “human sympathy,” expanding this perspective and experience to include others. Although Heschel describes the prophets of Israel as distinctive and exceptional, the underlying message suggests that all persons can practice the deep sympathy embodied and expressed by the prophets and that to the extent that they do so, they not only resemble certain aspects of the prophetic life but become more deeply human as well.

⁸⁵Heschel, *Prophets*, 395. Because prophetic sympathy is first and foremost, deep sympathy with and for God, my sense is that Heschel, viewing empathy as he does, avoids the word empathy for two reasons: first, so as not to suggest humans can fully comprehend or experience God’s *essence*. In this way, he can emphasize an intimate relatedness between the divine and the human while still preserving their inherent difference. For Heschel, humans do not become God anymore than God becomes human; and second, in order to preserve the dignity and utter singularity of each person’s experience while emphasizing what we might call “*withness*,” that is, the quality and experience of *being with* that is at the heart of sympathy. For Heschel, sympathy is not pity. In actuality, his description and understanding of it is far more similar to the contemporary usage of the word empathy when the latter term is understood to mean the intentional and compassionate entering into of the experience of another. This understanding implies

each compound word, *syn* or *sym* in sympathy meaning “together or with” as opposed to *em*, a variant of *en*, in empathy meaning “in.” Heschel’s concern is to make clear that the prophet’s attitude and experience is one of *communion* not *fusion*. It appears as though he associates the former with sympathy and the latter with empathy. About sympathy Heschel states:

Sympathy is a state in which a person is open to the presence of another person. It is a feeling which feels the feeling to which it reacts—the opposite of emotional solitariness. In prophetic sympathy, man is open to the presence and emotion of the transcendent Subject. He carries within himself awareness of what is happening to God.⁸⁶

Just as divine pathos is occasioned by specific situations, so too the modes of prophetic sympathy are determined by the modes of the divine pathos. For example, “The pathos of love and the pathos of anger awake corresponding tones in the heart of the prophet.”⁸⁷ Sympathy appears variously as mercy and moral outrage, compassion and concelebration, joy and justice.

Although sympathy in the prophet’s life assumes many forms, Heschel notes the common and essential elements are the focusing of attention on God, the awareness of divine emotion, the intense concern for the divine pathos, and the sympathetic solidarity with God.⁸⁸ More specifically, Heschel adapts for his study the classification of sympathy

solidarity without signifying complete unification or oneness.

⁸⁶Ibid., 396.

⁸⁷Ibid., 151.

⁸⁸Ibid., 401. Heschel’s study gives attention to individual prophets (he considers Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Second Isaiah). However, in the most important part of the book, without meaning to suggest all the prophets are alike, he does intentionally treat the prophet phenomenologically as a type *sui generis*, highlighting not only the above mentioned common features but others as well. It is this composite treatment of prophetic characteristics that I will be making use of in Chapter 8.

developed by the German-Jewish philosopher, Max Scheler.⁸⁹ There is (1) community of feeling, or sympathy *with* God, and (2) fellow feeling, or sympathy *for* God. In the first type, what occurs is a “*feeling in common*,” like two friends standing at the coffin of a beloved third friend. Whereas the sorrow of the two friends is experienced independently of each other (the sorrow of one is neither caused by nor reinforced by the sorrow of the other), what they sense they feel and experience together.⁹⁰ Similarly, since the prophet and God are, so to speak, confronted with and concerned for the same object or reality, namely the spiritual and moral plight of the people of Israel, they can be said to share a community of feeling.⁹¹ The second type of sympathy, sympathy *for*, “involves the prophet’s intentional reference of the feeling of joy or sorrow to God’s experience.”⁹² Whereas sympathy *with* is characterized by a common feeling evoked by a common reality, situation, or concern, sympathy *for* is characterized by a “fellow feeling” whereby the emotional experience of the divine is felt and shared by the prophet. Heschel explains:

Such sympathy for God derives from an understanding of the situation and pathos of the Lord. The divine evokes a similar pathos in the prophet. The prophet may respond to the divine pathos only by way of intuiting what the pathos might be. The prophet’s personal concern for God also focused his emotions directly on the given pathos of God. Alongside his attention to the people—the occasion of divine pathos—he was also attentive to the pathos of God.⁹³

⁸⁹Ibid.; Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

⁹⁰Heschel, *Prophets*, 401, 402.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid., 402.

⁹³Ibid.

In this second type of sympathy, the prophet participates in or experiences God's experience.

Sympathy *with* God issues forth in solidarity with God, whether it is solidarity with the pain or the joy of God. Sympathy *for* God issues forth in compassionate communion with God, whether it is communion with the anguish or the tenderness of God.⁹⁴ The difference between the two might be conveyed by understanding sympathy *with* God as comparable to God being a window whose tint continually changes and through which the prophet sees the contemporary world whereas sympathy *for* God might be compared to a window held up by God through which the prophet sees the weather of God's heart. In either case, Heschel explains:

[S]ympathy has a dialogical structure. What characterizes prophetic existence is, indeed, an interpersonal relationship, either a relationship between the one who feels and the one who sympathizes with that feeling, or a relationship of having a feeling in common. Unlike the experience of the numinous or the feeling of sheer awe or fear, sympathy always refers to a person or persons.⁹⁵

Attuned to God, the prophets seize upon the idea that sympathy is the essential religious requirement.⁹⁶ In fact, Heschel shows why the words *daath elohim*, most often rendered "knowledge of God" and which in nearly all Semitic languages signify sexual union as well as mental and spiritual activity, can mean also "*sympathy for God*, attachment of the whole person, his love as well as his knowledge; an act of involvement, attachment or commitment to God."⁹⁷ For Heschel, to know God is to sympathize with

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., 396.

⁹⁶Ibid., 73.

⁹⁷Ibid.

God. *Daath elohim* connotes an intimacy with God, a sensitivity for what concerns God.⁹⁸ Again, what is involved for the prophets in sympathy is “not an experience of God, but an experience of a divine experience.”⁹⁹ Although the prophets do not possess a knowledge of the essence of God, they come to a knowledge or experiential understanding of God that manifests itself “as a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet[s’] reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos.”¹⁰⁰ Heschel writes:

The prophets received their knowledge of God either through the moment of revelation or through intuitive contemplation of the surrounding world. In the first case, they received an inspiration as an expression of the divine Person; in the second, they sensed the signs of God’s presence in history. They experienced the word as a living manifestation of God, and events in the world as effects of His activity. The given factor, whether the word or the event, was for them an expression of the divine.¹⁰¹

In the dialogical nature of the divine-human relationship “sympathy is the prophet’s answer to inspiration, the correlative to revelation.”¹⁰² Heschel continues:

Prophetic sympathy is a response to transcendent sensibility. It is not, like love, an attraction to the divine Being, but the assimilation of the prophet’s emotional life to the divine, an assimilation of function, not being. The emotional experience of the prophet becomes the focal point for the prophet’s understanding of God. He lives not only his personal life, but also the life of God. The prophet hears God’s voice and feels God’s heart.¹⁰³

Thus, for the prophets, it is not their sentiment or the experience of their own

⁹⁸Sherman, *Promise of Heschel*, 33.

⁹⁹Heschel, *Prophets*, 554.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

suffering that enables them to be sympathetic to and caring toward other human persons.

It is their intuitive awareness of and concern for what moves God. Heschel explains:

[T]he prophet is guided, not by what he feels, but rather by what God feels. . . .

It is rarely a personal, direct reaction to a situation, and mostly an articulation of God's view and an identification with it. Yet, in taking God's part he defends the people's position, since in truth God's pathos is compassion. For compassion is the root of God's relationship to man.¹⁰⁴

In point of fact, the prophet is a person in the middle, standing between God and humankind, possessing sympathy for both. "In the presence of God he takes the part of the people. In the presence of the people he takes the part of God."¹⁰⁵

Before the prophets are heralds of the word of God, they are first listeners to the heart of God: "They feel fiercely because they hear deeply."¹⁰⁶ What the prophets hear, in one form or another, is the intensity of God's love occasioned by the condition of humanity. As a result of listening to God listening to the world, the prophets listen to the world as well. The prophets' sympathy with and for God stimulates and sets in motion their sympathy for others and the world, and, Heschel insists, whether the prophets sense divine compassion or anger, mercy or judgment, joy or sorrow, the motive force is always love.¹⁰⁷ Even though, as Heschel notes, God transcends both justice and mercy, He

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 403.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 28.

¹⁰⁶Heschel, "The Religious Message," in Jacob Neusner and Noam M. M. Neusner, eds., To Grow in Wisdom, 154.

¹⁰⁷Heschel emphasizes that God's wrath as depicted in the Hebrew Bible has been grossly misunderstood over the ages. This misunderstanding reached its climax in the second century in the teachings of Marcion of Sinope, who considered himself a faithful follower of Paul, and who not only "affirmed an abrupt discontinuity between the gracious God and the just God," but also depicted the God of the Hebrew scriptures as mainly stern, frightful, and angry and the God of the New Testament as loving. For Heschel, divine anger and judgment are not antithetical to God's mercy and compassion but complementary to them. He believes that anger, too, is an expression of God's concern. He cautions that

points out:

God rules the world by justice and compassion, or love. These two ways are not divergent, but rather complementary, for it is out of compassion that justice is administered. But again and again His compassion, or love, is manifested in the world. . . . He would be unjust to His own nature were He to act in justice without compassion.¹⁰⁸

Heschel underscores that the prophets sense and disclose divine pathos not divine judgment. Despite the fact that judgment is a part of divine pathos, the prophets' call to justice does not so much emphasize justice as an idea as it focuses attention on the God of justice, on God's concern for justice.¹⁰⁹ He emphasizes that whereas love is comprised of justice and mercy, mercy has precedence. Therefore, just as divine pathos implies and includes divine ethos, so too does it presuppose, require, and signify divine love. This is consistent with the kabbalistic view of the relationship between *Din* and *Hesed*.

Heschel declares, "All expressions of pathos are attempts to set forth God's aliveness."¹¹⁰ Therefore, all responses of prophetic sympathy, whether back to God or through God to humankind, are in essence the extension of God's aliveness. By God's livingness, Heschel means to stress that for the prophet (and for the biblical person in

the anger of God cannot be treated in isolation, that it is a secondary emotion, "never the ruling passion," and stresses that God's concern is always its prerequisite and source. For Heschel, the anger of the Lord is "a tragic necessity," and "distasteful to God." It is provoked by humans who may also revoke it. "The call of anger," he maintains, "is a call to cancel anger." Divine disappointment, anger, and judgment are due to the fact that the intimate and loving relatedness initiated by God makes claims and demands on humankind. But it is the certainty of God's love and mercy that enable the prophets to accept God's anger. Heschel reiterates, "The normal and original pathos is love and mercy. Anger is preceded as well as followed by compassion." As a mode of pathos Heschel characterizes divine anger as *suspended* love, as mercy withheld, as mercy in concealment. Anger prompted by love is an interlude. It is as if compassion were waiting to resume." Above all, Heschel maintains that though the wrath of God is real, it is transcended by God's love. Heschel, *Prophets*, 358-93.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 280, 281.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 279.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 355.

general) God is not a thing, not an organism, force or cause. For the prophet, God's life is personal (without reducing God to a person), a unity of conscious acts, "of creating, demanding, expressing, and responding," "intentional acts of regard and a concern for the nonself."¹¹¹ Sympathy is the result of the prophets being moved by God who has been and is continually moved by the human situation. Like the pathos that evokes it, it too involves choice. It requires an act of self-dedication in order to actively co-operate with God and consciously to attune one's life to what concerns God. Since the human is the image of God (*tselem elohim*), and because God is fundamentally relational and caring, the possibility for sympathy always exists. Yet sympathy is a response not an automatic reflex. Sympathy is not a guarantee inherent in human beings anymore than is wonder or gratefulness. It is no more inevitable and spontaneous for persons than pathos is for God. Like pathos, sympathy is an intentional act, formed freely, and the result of decision and determination. From the prophetic perspective, divine pathos makes human sympathy possible and potent. Human cooperation and commitment make it a lived reality. It is this dialogical structure, this "communion with the divine in experience and suffering," that makes persons aware of, compassionate and responsive toward others.¹¹²

At the heart of Heschel's theology and life is the conviction that divine pathos evokes human sympathy for God and compassion for what and who moves God. Divine pathos enables and encourages humans to carry within themselves insight into the experience of God, to be available to one another, and to prevent emotional solitariness. When acted upon, sympathy is no mere feeling of sentimentality but "a whole way of

¹¹¹Ibid., 356.

¹¹²Ibid., 398.

being” based on aligning oneself with God’s cares and sorrows regarding the world.

“This,” Heschel surmises, “is the reward and the distinction of prophetic existence: to be attuned to God.”¹¹³ It is also the challenge and the distinction of becoming truly human.

The power of the presence of sympathy is so striking that, for Heschel, it approximates the essence of religious existence. He comments:

Perhaps it is in sympathy that the ultimate meaning, worth, and dignity of religion may be found. The depth of the soul becomes the point where an understanding for God and a harmony with transcendent possibility spring to birth.¹¹⁴

In other words, sympathy is a privileged opportunity for human persons to be exposed to the heart of God as well as to discover self-transcendence and therein what it means to be human. For Heschel, *apatheia* not only is contrary to the nature of the divine but also to the nobility of the human person. He insists, “The essence of life is intense care and concern,” and advises that the deepest wisdom humans can attain is the realization that their true destiny is to aid, to serve.¹¹⁵ He writes:

The degree to which one is sensitive to other people’s suffering, to other men’s humanity, is the index of one’s own humanity. . . . Man achieves fullness of being in fellowship, in care for others. He expands his existence by “bearing his fellow-man’s burden” . . . the degree of our being human stands in direct proportion to the degree in which we care for others.¹¹⁶

In light of the above description, and in contrast to the impassive Stoic sage who is a *homo apathetikos*, Heschel characterizes the prophet as a *homo sympathetikos*.¹¹⁷

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 136, 296.

¹¹⁶Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 46-47.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 395.

“The prophet is called *ish-ha-ruah*, a man filled with divine pathos” (Hos.9:7)¹¹⁸ Heschel

explains:

The pathos of God is upon him. It moves him. It breaks out in him like a storm in the soul, overwhelming his inner life, his thoughts, feelings, wishes, and hopes. It takes possession of his heart and mind, giving him the courage to act against the world.¹¹⁹

When he uses the words “against the world,” it is important to remember that the prophets are neither inherently nor perpetually contemptuous toward Israel or humankind. Just as God’s anger or judgment is secondary to God’s mercy and compassion and a sign of suspended love, so too the prophets’ judgment and passion are rooted in divine sympathy and care.

Unlike his peers, the prophet is overwhelmed by the grandeur of God’s presence. Others might sense the divine pathos. The prophet hears and apprehends the divine pathos and “is convulsed by it to the depths of his soul.”¹²⁰ The prophet hears what others don’t hear, sees what others are unable or refuse to see, and feels intensely what others feel only slightly or not at all. That God is so moved, moves the prophet. It is because “the grandeur and majesty of God do not come to expression in the display of ultimate sovereignty and power, but rather in rendering righteousness and mercy” that the prophet is a person of sympathy.¹²¹ Pathos moves the prophets to love God not with emotional sobriety and passive assent but with their entire mind, heart, soul, and strength. It moves the prophets to harmonize their beings with the fundamental and emotional content of

¹¹⁸Ibid., 403.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 395.

¹²⁰Ibid., 394.

¹²¹Ibid., 274.

divine pathos and not simply to mental appropriation. It moves the prophets to be symbols of responsiveness to God and responsibility to others. It moves the prophets to communicate the discovery of being present at and participating in a divine event, to speak evocative words that shatter indifference, to speak imaginative words that make God present, to call for repentance, and to announce God's concern for justice which grows out of God's compassion for humankind.

As we have seen, in the religious sense, sympathy means "to identify one's concern with the concern of God."¹²² In the religious life, it means to translate God's concern into sympathy in action, that is, into the compassion toward others and the concern for justice that God feels and shows. The prophets insist that it is not possible to make sense of the human situation apart from the divine situation. "The predicament of man is the predicament of God Who (sic) has a stake in the human situation."¹²³ Heschel maintains the prophets "not only sense God in history, but also history in God."¹²⁴ He describes the prophet as "a man who holds God and man in one thought at one time. He does not think of God without man and he does not think of man without God."¹²⁵ Elsewhere he expresses the same conviction: "The prophet cannot say Man without thinking God."¹²⁶ But the prophets, gripped by God's pathos, are not merely *concerned about* others. For Heschel, concern becomes an authentic "religion of sympathy" only

¹²²Ibid., 395.

¹²³Ibid., 291.

¹²⁴Ibid., 355.

¹²⁵Heschel, "Jewish Theology," in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 159.

¹²⁶Heschel, Prophets, 29.

when it is acted upon in concrete situations. Since divine pathos is not abstract but rather the expression of God's personal relatedness to the world, Heschel stresses that history is the domain of the prophet's concern and action. Pathos means "God does not stand outside the range of human suffering and sorrow. He is personally involved in, even stirred by, the conduct and fate of man."¹²⁷ Consequently, Heschel points out, the prophets "are moved by a responsibility for society, by a sensitivity to what the moment demands."¹²⁸ Concerned with God's concern, the prophets are emotionally invested in history and therefore preoccupied with justice.

This movement toward historical concreteness is evidenced in Heschel's own movement from the study to the streets where he became personally involved in the burning issues of his day. It was his decision in the 1960's to rework and elaborate on the doctoral dissertation of his youth, The Prophetic Consciousness, that compelled him to live the prophetic life he had studied in response to the urgent situations of his day. More and more he embodied the truthfulness of his own words: "Living is not a private affair of the individual. Living is what man does with God's time, what man does with God's world."¹²⁹ The trajectory of Heschel's life follows a similar path to that of Maimonides about whose last years Heschel writes:

This is Maimonides' last metamorphosis: From metaphysics to medicine, from contemplation to practice, from speculation to the imitation of God. God is not only the object of knowledge; He is the example one is to follow. Human beings whom He seeks to guide in this providence take the place of abstract concepts which constitute the means of intellectual perception of God. Preoccupation with the concrete man and the effort to

¹²⁷Ibid., 289.

¹²⁸Ibid., 279.

¹²⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 356.

aid him in his suffering is now the form of religious devotion. . . . Personal achievement is abandoned for the sake of enhancing God's presence in human deeds, 'to be like God in his actions.'"¹³⁰

Although Heschel's writings and life show an acute awareness of and involvement in the issues of his day since the early 1930's, the spirit of this description of Maimonides final transformation is illuminative of the intensification of Heschel's public role and sense of responsibility and mission toward the end of his own life.

In summary, "the prophets face a God of compassion, a God of concern and involvement," and it is here, in the pathos or concern of God that the divine and the human meet.¹³¹ "Pathos is the focal point for eternity and history, the epitome of all relationships between God and Man."¹³² Moreover, Heschel claims that it is because pathos is a dynamic modality and not a final reality that a living encounter and a loving relationship between God and God's people are possible.¹³³ Feeling a fellowship with the feelings of God, the prophets speak out of the fullness of their sympathy for God's pathos, seeking to impart in word and in action the intimate and eternal concern of the divine for humankind.¹³⁴

Mitzvah: The Sacredness and Revelance of the Common Deed

God's overture toward humanity and all of creation is alluded to in the sublimity and awesomeness of the created universe. God's search for humanity is even more

¹³⁰Heschel, "The Last Days of Maimonides," in Insecurity of Freedom, 289, 290.

¹³¹Heschel, Prophets, 296.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Ibid., 31.

directly revealed, Heschel maintains, in the Bible. In addition to sensing God's presence in nature and in the Bible, Heschel includes the way of sensing God in sacred deeds as comprising the three main aspects of Jewish and religious existence corresponding to the spiritual traditions and practices of worship, learning, and action respectively. Again, for Heschel, the God of nature is the God of history who is known by doing God's will.¹³⁵ This triumvirate not only captures three distinct ways to reach the one destination, but also together form the basis for the pious life, that is, a spirituality with integrity, a life of reverence and responsibility, and the way to reverse and repair the cosmic catastrophe.

Specifically, along with prayer it is the prayerful enactment of common deeds that represent humanity's preeminent response to God's pathos-inspired pursuit of humankind. *Mitzvot*, or sacred deeds, that is, the consecration of single moments and single acts, are humanity's primary means for responding to being a need of God. It is through acts of prayer and prayerful acts that humans join with God in accomplishing *tikkun*. To pray is to make visible or to extend the presence of God in the world, while what makes common deeds holy is that they are "carried out as variations on the theme of prayer."¹³⁶ For Heschel, prayer that is devoid of action is merely counterfeit faith while action not rooted in prayer runs the risk of being ill-motivated, misguided, and self-serving. He emphasizes that in Judaism the good is pen-ultimate to the holy and properly understood cannot exist without the holy.¹³⁷ Heschel states, "Prayer must not be dissonant with the rest of living. . . . The divorce of liturgy and living, of prayer and practice, is

¹³⁵Heschel, God in Search of Man, 31.

¹³⁶Heschel, "On Prayer," in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 258.

¹³⁷Heschel, Quest for God, 95.

more than a scandal; it is a disaster.” He continues, “Prayer not verified by conduct is an act of desecration and blasphemy.”¹³⁸ In Quest for God, Heschel expresses a similar conviction. He writes:

Faith comes over us like a force urging to action. . . . Faith is but a seed, while the deed is its growth or decay. Faith disembodied, faith that tries to grow in splendid isolation, is but a ghost, for which there is no place in our psychophysical world.¹³⁹

Heschel stresses that the theological battle waged by Christians against one another regarding faith and works has never been an issue of disagreement within Judaism. He maintains that the dichotomy is, in fact, only apparent and not real. He states:

To us, the basic problem is neither what is the right action nor what is the right intention. The basic problem is: what is right living? And life is indivisible. The inner sphere is never isolated from outward activities. Deed and thought are bound into one.¹⁴⁰

If faith compels people to action, and if to pray is to dream in league with God, then the intentional deed is the gift and opportunity to participate with God in making that dream a reality on earth. The sacredness and purpose of our actions, according to Heschel, reside in their being expressions of our awareness of both *halakha* (law) and *aggadah* (inwardness), source and destiny, promise and demand, ecstasy and expectation, return and work for repair. Heschel emphasizes that prayer and action are requirements for authentic piety, but more so that prayer, especially understood as bringing the *Shekinah* back from exile, and *mitsvah*, understood as a deed in the form of a prayer, contribute to the repair and redemption of the individual person and world, as well as

¹³⁸Heschel, “On Prayer,” in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 260, 262.

¹³⁹Heschel, Quest for God, 110.

¹⁴⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 296.

serve to restore the original unity of the *sefirot*. The most profound meaning and reason for doing the *mitzvot* is because it is a way to dwell and participate in the divine mystery.¹⁴¹ Kabbalists believe each commandment contains within it hints of its origin within specific *sefirot* or points to a combination of forces within the sefirotic world. Performing *mitzvot* with *kavannah*, enables the person or persons actually “to abide in the designated sefirotic realm and to experience the flow of divine energy (*shefa*) that flowed through those *sefirot*.”¹⁴² As mentioned above, more important even than the experiential participation in the sefirotic realm is that the *mitzvot* are “divinely given means by which the [person] could actually affect the condition of the inner divine world. The *sefirot* ever needed to be brought together, so that divine life might flow through them and sustain the lower worlds.”¹⁴³

Before we can fully understand Heschel’s insistence that sacred deeds are instrumental in effecting *tikkun*, we must consider first what makes a deed sacred. To begin with Heschel emphasizes:

Judaism stands and falls with the idea of the absolute relevance of human deeds. Even to God we ascribe the deed. *Imitatio dei* is in deeds. The deed is the source of holiness.¹⁴⁴

Because the essence of the divine is not accessible to human cognition or experience, God is most fully known and experienced in actions revealed in and through human

¹⁴¹Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 129.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*

¹⁴³*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴Heschel, *Quest*, 109.

history: “[E]very *act* of man is an encounter of the human and the holy.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the mystery and deepest meaning of being human is most evident in the fulfillment of divine requirements, that is, in what humans actually do with their lives as an answer to the question: “What is required of me?” As stated earlier, it is in humanity’s analogy of doing, in acting in the likeness of God, that humankind not only expresses their greatest nobility but also most resembles and draws closest to God.

A *mitsvah* is a way to holiness and an encounter with God, but first it is a commandment. Literally, *mitzvot* refer to the 613 prescriptions in the Torah, as calculated by the rabbinic tradition. In light of Heschel’s view, it is more accurate to say that the reason *mitzvot* are the way to holiness is *because* they are commandments. Heschel writes:

Now to Judaism religion is not a feeling for something that is, but *an answer* to Him who is asking us to live in a certain way. *It is in its very origin a consciousness of duty, of being committed to higher ends; a realization that life is not only man’s but also God’s sphere of interest.*¹⁴⁶

Heschel believes it is unfortunate that demands and requirements are so offensive to modern sensibilities. As stated above, for Heschel, to be human is to be commanded, to have something expected of you. He views *mitzvot* not as evidence of divine severity but as expressions of divine generosity and personal concern since they provide humans with the unparalleled opportunity both to be in an intimate, loving relationship with God and to stretch toward self-transcendence and nobility. About the latter, Heschel writes:

Man is not for the sake of good deeds; the good deeds are for the sake of man. Judaism asks for more than works, for more than the *opus operatum*.

¹⁴⁵Heschel, God in Search of Man, 136.

¹⁴⁶Heschel, Quest for God, 108. See also Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 175.

The goal is not that a ceremony be *performed*; the goal is that man be *transformed*; to worship the Holy in order to be holy. The purpose of the mitsvot is *to sanctify man*.¹⁴⁷

Heschel claims “the meaningfulness of the *mitsvot* consists in their being vehicles by which we advance on the road to spiritual ends.”¹⁴⁸ In this sense, the *mitsvot* aid persons in the ongoing event of becoming human. They are given to sanctify humans, to make them holy. By performing holy deeds, *doing* influences *being* and transforms the doers into a holy people. Heschel writes, “To perform deeds of holiness is to absorb the holiness of deeds.”¹⁴⁹

Therefore, one central reason for consecrating common deeds is because they are formational and transformational. Actions shape and change those who do them. “The *mitsvot* are formative,” says Heschel. “The soul grows by noble deeds. The soul is illumined by sacred acts. Indeed, the purpose of all mitsvot is to refine man.”¹⁵⁰ What do *mitsvot* teach humans? According to Heschel, *mitsvot* cultivate reverence and engender *kavanah* (intention and conscious engagement).¹⁵¹ They teach us to sense God’s eternal presence and how to be present. They teach us to make a habit of good actions, and mark indelibly within us the preference for justice.¹⁵² They teach us not only to imitate but to represent the divine, to express God, since they are ways of celebrating God’s presence in

¹⁴⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 311.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 295.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 310.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 357.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 345.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*

action.¹⁵³ “We ennoble the self by disclosing the divine,” says Heschel. “God is hiding in the world and our task is to let the divine emerge from our deeds.”¹⁵⁴

Rather than being a rigid, burdensome imposition, Heschel views *mitzvot* as opportunities for the daily practice of creative living oriented toward love, the highest form of human nobility. He states:

The law, stiff with formality, is *a cry for creativity*; a call for nobility concealed in the form of commandments. It is not designed to be a yoke, a curb, a straight jacket for human action. Above all, the Torah asks for *love: thou shalt love thy God; thou shalt love thy neighbor*. All observance is training in the art of love. To forget that love is the purpose of all *mitsvot* is to vitiate their meaning.¹⁵⁵

Over against the Pauline disparagement of the law and emphasis on grace, developed later by Luther and others, stressing the primacy of grace over the law and works, Heschel explains that a central concern to Jewish thinking and living is the attempt to overcome the tendency to see the world in one dimension, to view life from only one perspective, and thus to reduce history exclusively to God’s actions or to human action, either to grace or to man’s initiative.¹⁵⁶ He insists:

The marvelous and the mundane, the sacred and the secular, are not mutually exclusive, nor are the natural and the supernatural, the temporal and eternal, kept apart. The heart of the relationship of God and man is reciprocity, interdependence. The task is to humanize the sacred and to sanctify the secular.¹⁵⁷

According to Heschel, more than in nature, it is in the *mitzvot* that the immanence

¹⁵³Ibid., 312, 356.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 358.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 307.

¹⁵⁶Heschel, Israel, 159.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

of God is most uniquely and acutely found. Unlike ceremonies which are expressions of humans, *mitzvot* are the expression and interpretation of the will of God.¹⁵⁸ The *mitzvot* are the place where the human and the divine meet, where earth and heaven come together.¹⁵⁹ In and through *mitzvot*, humans not only encounter God but God encounters humans. Heschel believes God is disguised in the *mitzvot*.¹⁶⁰ He claims the *mitzvot* are means of evoking in us the awareness that “we live in the neighborhood of God, of living in the holy dimension.” They are reminders that we are stewards not landlords of the universe.¹⁶¹

Heschel also makes clear that *mitzvot* are humankind’s faith-filled response to sin and evil. He writes:

Judaism insists upon the single deed as the instrument in dealing with evil. At the end of days, evil will be conquered by the One; in historic times evils must be conquered one by one.¹⁶²

We hear in this distinction between evil and evils the difference between humanity’s role in *tikkun* and God’s ultimate accomplishment of it. In more overt kabbalistic language, Arthur Green adds to Heschel’s point by describing how Israel, especially the righteous, must do battle with the *Sitra Ahara* (“the Other Side,” evil, antidivine forces). He writes:

Every good deed they do, every commandment they fulfill or prayer they offer with the proper mystical intent, serves to awaken the *Shekinah*. She unites with her spouse, is energized by Him, and they together become mighty warriors in the battle against evil. They are more powerful than

¹⁵⁸Heschel, Quest for God, 114.

¹⁵⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 353.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 312.

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, 356.

¹⁶²Heschel, Israel, 160.

their wicked counterparts and ultimate victory will surely belong to them. But they will be able to claim that victory only when the merit of human goodness clearly outweighs the burden of human evil, a condition against which all the forces of evil and temptation are arrayed.¹⁶³

The performance of *mitzvot* is humankind's way to resist evil, to participate fully in the healing of the cosmos, and to arouse the final redemption. Holy deeds are the keys that unlock the gate that encourages the coming of the Messiah. *Mitzvot* epitomize the potency and the possibilities, not to mention the purposefulness, of the divine-human relationship. Whereas humankind has the ability and the responsibility to set *tikkun* in motion, God alone has the capacity to conquer evil and to bring about ultimate redemption. About this unique partnership, Heschel states:

The world is in need of redemption, but the redemption must not be expected to happen as an act of sheer grace. Man's task is to make the world worthy of redemption. His faith and his works are preparations for *ultimate redemption*.¹⁶⁴

In summary, as prayer is the perfect response to the glory or presence of God, so is sympathy the fitting response to God's pathos. Because God's passionate and intimate concern is not expressed in general but rather is evoked by and personally related to humanity's situation, the necessary extension of prophetic sympathy for the divine is compassionate action toward humankind. Heschel maintains that the preciousness that loyalty to the *mitzvot* bestows on the life of the individual and community includes not only cleanliness, health, strength, an inner life, and holiness, but also compassion.¹⁶⁵ The realization of prophetic engagement today, he reminds, is what humans do with God's

¹⁶³Green, Guide to the Zohar, 120.

¹⁶⁴Heschel, God in Search of Man, 380.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 360.

ultimate concern. Prophetic concern for what concerns God translates into *mitzvot* manifested as the “horizontal” expression of sympathy for others who suffer, as well as “the challenge to overcome inequity, injustice, helplessness, suffering, carelessness, [and] oppression.”¹⁶⁶ Whereas the full flowering of *mitzvot* will be the “uniting of the blessed Holy One and His *Shekinah*,”¹⁶⁷ the sanctification of the common deed on earth is shown not merely by pity or the stirring of emotions for others, but rather in the expression of outrage at the callousness and indifference that allows people to suffer unnecessarily, in the act of standing with those who are in agony, and in the compassionate action to alleviate the conditions that cause others to suffer unjustly. Finally, humanity’s task is not to redeem the world but rather, by performing *mitzvot* as acts of sympathy for God and compassionate solidarity with others who suffer, to make preparations for the ultimate redemption.

We turn now to the discussion of a mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral theology and care inspired by Abraham Heschel’s work as explicated thus far in this dissertation.

¹⁶⁶ Heschel, Who Is Man?, 107.

¹⁶⁷ Green, Guide to the Zohar, 130.

CHAPTER 7

A MYSTICAL APPROACH TO PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND CARE

Preamble

When one reviews the formal history of pastoral theology and care in a North American context and focuses on the literature from the burgeoning of the modern pastoral care movement over the first three quarters of the twentieth century that articulates the theory and practice of pastoral care, seven dominant characteristics can be noted. First, the primary spokespersons and actors have been men. Second, from a religious perspective, pastoral theology and care have been influenced largely by Protestantism. Third, the theory, tone, and method of pastoral care have been heavily psychological. Fourth, pastoral care has assumed increasingly a bearing of professionalism. Fifth, it has tended to focus on the individual to the exclusion of the communal, societal, ecological, and cosmic. Sixth, the orientation and practice of pastoral care has been influenced by a therapeutic-medical model which tends to view persons needing or seeking care as patients, thus focusing care on pathology, diagnosis, and treatment if not cure. Lastly, the specific practice of counseling has tended to be regarded as the definitive act of pastoral care overshadowing the broader notion of caregiving.¹

¹ See for example, E. Brooks Holifield, A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983); Charles V. Gerkin, An Introduction to Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997); Kathleen J. Greider, Gloria A. Johnson, and Kristen J. Leslie, "Three Decades of Women Writing for Our Lives," in Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 21-50.

Although the literature from the last quarter of a century seems to point toward and substantiate the beginning of a much needed shift in and challenge to these characteristics, generated chiefly by women and people of color, these deeply rooted assumptions and tendencies must continue to be confronted or complemented by alternative views, methodologies, and practices.²

Even though this dissertation is not meant to be an exhaustive response or corrective to each of the above mentioned traits and tendencies, the main aims of this project which loosely correspond to the motivation, task, method and purpose of pastoral care can be appreciated fully only in light of the overriding attributes and operative inclinations named above. These aims are: To reemphasize the spiritual roots of care; to reacquaint ourselves with the spiritual quest to which pastoral care is in service; to recover the mystical (or contemplative) and the prophetic dimensions of faith in order to consider what they might have to offer in the construction and practice of a contemporary pastoral theology and care, and to shift our understanding of pastoral care away from the view that it is a ministry to and for troubled individuals aimed at helping them find relief from their trials to the view that it is a ministry to and for all persons and communities offered and available at all times of life helping them to become holy and the world to become more just and harmonious.

²For a few representative examples of this shift, in addition to Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern's *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, see also Pamela D. Couture, *Blessed Are the Poor: Women's Poverty, Family Policy, and Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), Maxine Glaz and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, eds. *Women in Travail and Transition: A New Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); Larry Kent Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystems Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992); Kathleen J. Greider, *Reckoning With Aggression: Theology, Violence, and Vitality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, ed., *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); Edward P. Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), and *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

The purpose of these last two chapters is to explain the main features and implications of an alternative approach to pastoral theology and care inspired by the works of Rabbi Heschel in dialogue with the writings of kindred and representative Christian spiritual guides, and with me, a Roman Catholic pastoral theologian and minister. It is beyond the scope of this work to show how such an approach addresses each and every predicament mentioned earlier in this work. These chapters are intended to be a preliminary response to the problems outlined by Heschel in Chapter One in dialogue with those identified by the representative voices summarized in Chapter Two. As a Catholic I am most familiar with the Christian ecclesial context so my main focus is to transpose Heschel's writings to the situation I know best. I will leave to Jewish theologians and pastoral caregivers the task of interpreting the implications of Heschel's life and work for Jewish pastoral care.

As assessed by Rabbi Heschel and our other representative exegetes of the human condition, these ailments add up to a spiritual crisis, and together form the milieu and are the negative impetus for a mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care. Once again, chief among this constellation of ailments are: an atrophied contemplative spirit, human callousness and the instrumentalization of life, narcissism and superficiality, the lost sense of the ineffable and mystery, spiritual amnesia and the denial of transcendence, the vulgarization of religion, excessive rationalism, technology devoid of humanity, the parochialism of the scientific method, the idolization of needs, and a feeling of existential restlessness.

In addition to speaking to the contemporary situation and responding to the spiritual crisis of our day, as a *via positiva* Heschel's theological writings and personal

spirituality weave together biblical, rabbinic, kabbalistic, and Hasidic influences to provide the creative stimulus, substance, and vision for another approach to a theology and care that for the past century has been predominantly Protestant, psychological, individualistic, and medical in its conception, orientation, and practice. Stirred and encouraged by the spiritual wisdom and prophetic piety of this eminent and important Jewish theologian, these final two chapters are intended to suggest one such alternative conception and sense of direction for pastoral theology and care.

As a response to the contemporary human predicament and as an approach that is born in and guided by Heschel's contemplative insights and prophetic imagination, this approach is based on the conviction that the fundamental vocation of the pastoral caregiver is to extend to others the extravagant love of God and thereby to help persons become more fully human and more genuinely holy. By so doing caregivers participate with God and others in the reordering and recreation of the world. Rooted in Heschel's theological anthropology and conceived as a response to the signs of the time, it aims to evoke, encourage, and support others to become the human persons God intended and created them to be. Heschel's perspective upholds the innate dignity of the person, encourages care that is oriented toward a perception of humanity as the unique, sacred image of God, while emphasizing both the precariousness of the human situation and the role and place of the community in the actualizing of one's humanity before God. Heschel's insistence on the pathos of God and the subsequent anthropology, one grounded in divine concern for humankind and committed to a theology of *imago Dei* and *covenant* whereby the human person is considered most fully a person when living as

a partner of God, set in motion the retrieval of the spiritual roots of care, accentuate its sacred task, and inspire a contemporary paradigm for its practice.

Foremost in this “new” paradigm is the reclaiming of the evocative and formational action of care that until recently have been largely absent, relegated to a secondary place or, as mentioned earlier, given over to other functions of ministry. The specific objective of this chapter is to describe the main features of such a mystical approach to care highlighting its spiritual roots, theological rationale, pastoral aims and enactment, and its distinctive and critical contributions.

As we will see, what makes this type of care unique as compared to other models or calls for pastoral care and counseling that emphasize “nurturance” and “growth” is *what* it specifically seeks to evoke and cultivate, namely, a contemplative consciousness and mystical way of living, and how this impacts the persons and communities it hopes to form and guide.³ In particular, as the execution of Heschel’s call for the cultivation of radical amazement and a contemplative consciousness, this mystical, maieutic, and formational dimension of care, what I have identified as the Mystical or *evocative-formational* expression of care, will complement and challenge the liberal Protestant point of view and the psychotherapeutic paradigm which even today continue to have a disproportionate amount of influence on the conception and enactment of ecclesial care and ministry.

Both the mystical and the prophetic dimensions of care (the latter which will be spelled out in Chapter Eight) are required of a pastoral theology that claims to be rooted

³See for example, Howard Clinebell, Contemporary Growth Therapies: Resources for Actualizing Human Wholeness (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1983); and Counseling for Spiritually Empowered Wholeness: A Hope-Centered Approach [new ed.] (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 1995).

in the presence and pathos of God and of a pastoral care that aspires to maturity and integrity. Rather than being something new, these expressions of faith translated into care are, in fact, to transpose the words of Peter Maurin, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, “so old they look like new.” What is new is the twenty-first century context that cries out for the inspiration, wisdom, and alternative vision that mystical awareness and prophetic consciousness offer.

The Definition of Key Terms

A mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral theology and care begins by reclaiming and restating the theological foundations that underlie the motivation, task, method, and purpose of care. Before I do so, it will be helpful to clarify what I mean by the frequently used terms, pastoral theology, spiritual care, and pastoral care.⁴

Pastoral Theology

In one sense, whether organized and articulated or spontaneous and implicit, people have been practicing pastoral theology and care ever since humans understood God to be the source of life, gathered in communities called together by faith in that God, sensed their responsibility for others by virtue of their faith, acted out that responsibility, and talked together about what they believed and how they behaved. In more recent times, pastoral theologians and caregivers from Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant communities have joined together in the ongoing and increasingly refined practice of theological reflection drawn from the lived

⁴Chapter 7 in its entirety is meant to be a critique of, a dialogue with, and an alternative to other definitions and understandings of these terms that have been and still are operative and influential in the field of pastoral theology, care, and counseling.

experience of the faith community.⁵ In Christian circles, systematic or dogmatic theology refers to the comprehensive method of study whereby we seek to understand and articulate the fundamental beliefs and essential teachings of the Christian faith, in their relationship to one another and to the whole.⁶ In relationship to the discipline of systematic theology, modern pastoral theology refers to the study and interpretation of these core beliefs and their implications for actual living by the community of faith. Although the fluidity of theology and practice and the increasing plurality of faith traditions means there is no uniformly agreed upon definition of pastoral theology, for our purposes here we can say that it is the discipline and ongoing act of bringing theology to bear on pastoral care in the context of actual situations and of the reciprocal action of allowing those situations and subsequent pastoral actions to inform, confirm, and even reformulate theology. As praxis informs theory, the spiral of theological reflection continues so that theology renames as well as informs practice. In short, pastoral theology is the mutual and dynamic relationship between theory and practice whereby theology

⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 1, this dissertation concentrates on the Jewish-Christian tradition. In its practical application I am thinking primarily though not exclusively with the practice of Christian communities, in particular Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant. It does not include nor address, for example, pastoral care from an Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist perspective.

⁶ In Protestantism, modern theology has typically been divided into the categories and disciplines of biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology (theory), and Christian ethics (Practice). Within modern times, Catholicism divided the explication and study of theology into dogmatic theology (theory) and moral theology (practice). Practical theology referred to the reflection on the ministerial tasks of the Church. In the seventeenth century Roman Catholics divided moral theology into ascetical and mystical theology which together encompass spiritual theology. Ascetical theology "is concerned with the efforts we as free and responsible individuals have to make to prepare for the visitation of God." Mystical theology "explores the stages of development in prayer, the implications of a more intense life of communion with God, and what Christian service may mean as we move along the path of 'perfection.'" Whereas ascetical theology refers to what humans *do* to be open to and aware of the presence of God, mystical theology deals with what *God* does *in us*. See "An Introduction to Spiritual Theology: The Theory That Undergirds Our Practice," Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church, Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, eds., (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1990), 12-16.

informs and compels practice, practice corroborates or reforms theology, and theology renames and guides practice as the spiral continues.

Prior to the sixteenth century, theology was understood as the practice of holy wisdom. Essentially, the only theology operative was spiritual theology understood as the act of reflecting on the mystery of God and God's relationship with the created universe in light of and for the benefit of faith, that is, for the *human experience* of God. There was no theologizing apart from the practice of faith. All theology was spiritual theology in that it was prayerful reflection at the service of cultivating and forming greater intimacy with God and loving kindness toward others. In a passage clarifying his understanding of the integral relationship between theology and faith, Heschel uses a creative image to convey a similar conviction. He states:

In antiquity as well as in the Middle Ages, due to the scarcity of parchment, people would often write new texts on top of earlier written parchments. The term denoting such writings is "palimpsest." Metaphorically, I suggest that authentic theology is a palimpsest: scholarly, disciplined thinking grafted upon prayer.⁷

This statement is reminiscent of Evagrius, the fourth century Christian mystic whose definition of a theologian was "one whose prayer is true."⁸ Generated by Heschel's vision, pastoral care is the concern toward others that is the outgrowth of serious theological reflection beneath which lies a foundation of faith and prayer. In a similar vein, at the corporate level within Judaism, Hasidism emerged from Jewish mysticism as a "practical piety." The origin of Hasidism, the spiritual world in which the young Heschel was reared, was understood not only as an eighteenth century mystical

⁷Heschel, "On Prayer," 258.

⁸As quoted in Kenneth Leech, True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1980), 9.

revivalists movement that popularized the Kabbalah by taking certain ideas and making them accessible to the ordinary unlettered masses, but also in part as a reaction against a rabbinicism that appeared to many to have degenerated into religious formalism and against an obscure mysticism that was susceptible to becoming divorced from actual living. Joseph Dan explains: "For Hasidism, religion and ethics were one and the same."⁹

To identify a theology as pastoral signals an important shift in the perception and performance of theology or, perhaps I should say, indicates a recovery of the original spiritual roots and pastoral purpose of theology for the ancient Jewish and Christian communities.¹⁰ Technically, the work of systematic theology can be done independent of faith and the faith community. Pastoral theology, however, is the disciplined reflection of community members necessarily informed and illuminated by the experience of faith thus serving those caring for others who are knowingly or unknowingly striving to consecrate or ennoble their existence in the face of real, everyday circumstances. Theology is no longer the abstract formulation of religious concepts. Rather, it is "enacted theology."¹¹ For pastoral caregivers, to view pastoral theology as enacted theology means that theology and life, faith and practice, are involved in an ongoing and mutual interaction and translation. Simply stated, pastoral care is the conscious and concrete translation of

⁹ Dan, Jewish Mysticism, 111.

¹⁰The word *pastoral* derives from the biblical word for shepherd, and pastoral theology and pastoral care have traditionally referred to the theology of shepherding and the pastor's oversight of the people of God respectively. Seward Hiltner, one of the founding fathers of pastoral theology, developed an approach to pastoral theology in terms of the shepherding perspective identifying three main operations or functions: healing, sustaining, and guiding which are all typified by tender, solicitous concern. See A. V. Campbell, "Pastor," and J.R. Burck and R. J. Hunter, "Pastoral Theology, Protestant," in Rodney Hunter, gen. ed., Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, 867; and Seward Hiltner, Preface to Pastoral Theology: The Ministry and Theory of Shepherding (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958).

¹¹Robert McAfee Brown, Theology in a New Key: Responding to Liberation Themes (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 71. See also Gerkin, Introduction, 121.

the tradition's living theology into practice rooted in ongoing prayer. Our working theology, inclusive of, for example, anthropology, psychology, ecclesiology, ecology, cosmology, soteriology, and eschatology; our ideas about grace, sin, evil, forgiveness, judgment, mercy; our image of God and our understanding of the divine-human relationship, wisely or unwittingly translate into concrete attitudes and actions as we seek to respond with care both to the inarticulate speech of the human heart and to the observed or revealed needs of others, be they persons, communities, or environments.¹²

Spiritual Care

Care is compassionate concern for another person, place, thing, life form, or situation. It is communicated by intentional, attentive, and sympathetic presence, gestures, or actions. *Spiritual* care or soul-care is care in which the caregiver acknowledges, celebrates, attends to, and tends the soul of another, that is, the deepest and inherently sacred dimension of the human person. Soul signifies the divine-human connection intrinsic to life understood in light of faith. If by soul we mean the sacred center of the human person rooted in God, then soulfulness refers to the full, conscious, and active living out of that relationship with God in everyday life. Paradoxically, the soul is whole and entire, yet unfinished, already present in a sense, yet a potential to be realized. Thus the care of souls is meant to foster soulfulness. The care of souls (*cura animarum*) involves supporting others in paying attention to and caring for this core of human living, in developing this intimate and sacred relationship. It is aimed at

¹²Although the main focus of this dissertation is not ecological care, I recognize that a mature, integral, and contextual pastoral theology and care must extend care of persons to care of the environment, as well as to communities and systems. A mystical-prophetic approach moves pastoral theology and care in this broader, more inclusive direction primarily as a result of the commitment to a vision that stresses the sacred dignity of every human person, the interconnectedness of all life, and the pursuit of justice.

cultivating awareness of God in ordinary everyday life and directed toward tending to a person's living in and for God. From the perspective of faith, this is indispensable for human becoming.

Soul-care takes place within the contours of a holistic spirituality and thus recognizes and respects the mind-body-spirit unity of the person. The term holistic "reflects a concern for wholeness, a desire for integration, and an attempt to understand the connections between the various aspects that constitute a given reality."¹³ About holistic spirituality, Wilkie Au writes:

In contrast to a dualistic, "either-or" mentality that sees things as irreconcilable opposites, holistic spirituality stresses a complementary, "both-and" attitude that is integrative and inclusive. Specifically, holistic spirituality opposes pitting the sacred against the secular, "this world" against the "next world," the individual against the social, and the spiritual against the material.¹⁴

Spiritual care, in other words, recognizes and addresses the deepest part of the human person while necessarily appreciating and valuing the *whole* person and acknowledging the delights and difficulties of the human situation and of the everyday world in which the person lives, moves, and ideally, strives to become holy. The spiritual caregiver is not so much a doctor who makes people better or a healer who cures people (as the medical-therapeutic model prescribes) but rather a soul-friend who accompanies others as they seek to translate faith into actual living. As such, the caregiver does not accompany a disembodied soul but a person or persons who are innately related to God and striving to live soulfully in the daily realities of life. The soul is not something that exists in a private

¹³Wilkie Au, "Holistic Spirituality," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey, (Collegeville: MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 488.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 489.

realm apart from society. Thus, soulful living is a way of living in all spheres of life, not a private superior sphere unto itself. It not only involves intrapersonal awareness of and attention to the relationship between one's body, mind, and spirit, but also the conscious, intentional, and spiritual actions in and with other persons, structures, and environments.¹⁵ The spiritual caregiver, aware of the tendency of the mind to divorce itself from the realities of the physical world, and of the tendency and the power of the materialistic life to distract people from spirituality, supports others in "holding together mind and body, ideas and life, spirituality and the world."¹⁶ Psychologists like James Hillman and Thomas Moore, and psychiatrist Gerald May, agree with the likes of Heschel, Fox, McNamara, and Rolheiser in identifying the great malady of the twentieth century as the "loss of soul."¹⁷ Each in their own way maintain attention to and care of soul is the way out of the rationalistic, dualistic, and compartmentalized thinking that is so prevalent and problematic in modern culture and contemporary communities of faith, the necessary response to soulless therapy, and the antidote to the emotional complaints of our time heard by therapists every day in their practices.¹⁸ Compiled from his years of

¹⁵See Howard Clinebell's "Sevenfold Path of Christian Well Being" with the diagram suggested by Nelle Morton in which six aspects of wholeness --- body, mind, relationships, work, play, and world --- represented as elongated ellipses that are dynamically interrelated and connected in and through a seventh round-shaped central component, namely, Spirit. Howard Clinebell, Anchoring Your Well Being: Christian Wholeness in a Fractured World (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997), 24-27. Another model is that of the "Lifeframe" described by the Jesuit, James Keegan, who maintains that God's activity occurs in four interrelated arenas of human life, namely, the individual, the interpersonal, the structural, and the environmental. James M. Keegan, "To Bring All Things Together: Spiritual Direction as Action for Justice," Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction, 1, no. 1 (January, 1995), 4-19.

¹⁶Thomas Moore, Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), xii-xiv.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, xi. Although not all the authors mentioned here have the same view of "soul," (for example, an exclusively religious transcendent connotation), it does symbolize for all of them the deepest essence of the human person.

¹⁸In addition to Hillman's Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World, see James Hillman, Insearch: Psychology and Religion (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), Revisioning Psychology (New

experience as a therapist, Moore's list of symptoms, for example, bear a resemblance to the spiritual ailments noted by Heschel and his theologically oriented dialogue partners from Chapter Two: emptiness, meaninglessness, vague depression, disillusionment about marriage, family, and relationship, a loss of values, yearning for personal fulfillment, and a hunger for spirituality.¹⁹

When care is mutually acknowledged or understood by caregiver and care recipient as being spiritual in nature, it is offered and received as a constitutive dimension of the process of human becoming, that is, as related to both humanization and sanctification. While care of soul involves "attending fully (with deep intention, feeling, and commitment) to the essential self in relationship to God,"²⁰ what makes care overtly spiritual or pastoral is not merely the "content" of care. Rather, when the consciously chosen enacting of care by the caregiver—that is, when the *why* of care, the *what* of care, the *how* of care, and the *to what end* of care—is necessarily derived from and dynamically connected to faith in a personal *caring* God, we can call that care spiritual.²¹ Although at times, the content of spiritual care involves the intentional care of soul, today the term "spiritual care" must also connote a particular *way* in which care is carried out.

York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1975), and We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—And the World's Getting Worse (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992). In addition to May's Will and Spirit, see Gerald G. May, Care of Mind, Care of Spirit: Psychiatric Dimensions of Spiritual Direction: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982), and The Awakened Heart: Living Beyond Addiction. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

¹⁹Moore, Care of Soul, xvi.

²⁰Jean Stairs, Listening for the Soul: Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 203.

²¹Although spiritual formation as an aspect of pastoral care and spiritual direction as a dimension of spiritual formation involve mutual awareness and even agreement between caregiver and the recipient of care as to the spiritual nature of this caring relationship, not all care, in order to be spiritual, requires that the beneficiary of care be aware of its spiritual nature.

The terms spiritual care or care of souls must neither suggest that the spiritual life is an exclusive or rare dimension of existence nor that it is merely one aspect among many other aspects of living (for example, physical life, emotional life, etc.) that together make up human existence. When viewed through the lens of a mystical-prophetic faith, all living is spiritual and all authentic spirituality is above all, a life.²² Thus, spiritual care is not merely care for one facet of a person's life called *spiritual*, no matter how exalted, but rather the care for the sacred core of people's lives offered to individuals and communities by those who understand and strive to live all of life spiritually, that is, in agreement and sympathy with the *ruah* (spirit) or movement of God who is the Source and Animator of all life. More specifically for Christians, the Spirit that informs and enlivens care is the Spirit of Jesus and therefore the care necessarily must be compatible with the person and work of Christ.

For Heschel, the term *spiritual* connotes a fundamental orientation to life that is *theotropic*, that is, the turning of all beings toward God. Spirit is not possible to grasp in itself. It is a *direction*. It signifies "the reference to the transcendent in our own existence, the direction of the Here toward the Beyond." Care that is spiritual, then, is motivated, guided, and permeated by a sense of "the relatedness of being to transcendent meaning" and as such alludes to a spiritual dimension of reality.²³ When conceived of as a direction or orientation in life, spiritual is not a synonym for the ethereal or the movement away from the material. Spiritual refers to a way of being in life, a way of being in and for the world that is inspired and informed by one's intentional reference or turning to God. As

²²"The spiritual life is first of all, a *life*." Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1958), 46.

²³Heschel, God in Search of Man, 416, 108.

we see, for example, in Howard Clinebell's dynamic diagram of human well being, authentic spirituality and thus spiritual care include attention to play as well as to work, to relationships and to the intellectual life, to care for one's body and to care for the world as understood from a dynamic and spiritual perspective of reality.²⁴ Re-imagining the prophetic consciousness for the practice of care, for example, means that the caregivers' concern for others is rooted in their prior concern for God and what concerns God. Even though the recipients of care may or may not be aware of the theological motivations for the care, every caregiver acts as "a kind of reminder of God (*shiviti*)."²⁵

Matthew Fox emphasizes that spiritual refers to a life-orientation or trajectory. He writes:

The Spirit is life, *ruah*, breath, wind. To be spiritual is to be alive, filled with *ruah*, breathing deeply, in touch with the wind. Spirituality is a life-filled path, a spirit-filled way of living. Taking a path is different from driving down a highway to work. A path has something personal about it; it implies choice or even mystery. To choose one path is to reject another. A path is a meandering walkway—you do not rush or even drive down a pathway. A path is not goal oriented. A path is *the way itself*, and every moment on it is a holy moment; a sacred seeing goes on there.²⁶

In light of the practice of spiritual care, this Spirit-animated vision, experience, movement and way motivate and guide the caregiver and directly or indirectly are what the caregiver hopes to evoke in the recipient of care.

Whereas the spiritual path is deeply personal, it is not individualistic. With implications for care, Fox concurs with Rabbi Heschel. He states:

²⁴Clinebell, *Anchoring Your Well Being*, 24.

²⁵Heschel, "Pikuach Neshama: To Save a Soul," in S. Heschel, ed., *Moral Grandeur*, 57.

²⁶Fox, *Creation Spirituality*, 11-12.

While there is something deeply personal about the paths we choose to walk down, spirituality is also radically communitarian. The Spirit is not bound to a path just because we are on it. Pathways beckon us out of their beauty, but they beckon *us*, not *me*, not *my private ego* hoarding my private property or following my private way. A path is a way of solidarity, of sharing the beauty with all the others on the way; it is also a sharing of the pain and the struggle with all the others on the way.²⁷

Solidarity is a constitutive dimension of the spiritual life and therefore of care as well

Pastoral Care

When the understanding, impetus, and action of care are conceived not only as a faith-response to a caring God but also as a requisite dimension of being part of a living tradition and community of faith, then that care is pastoral. What makes care pastoral, in my opinion, is not that it is tender and solicitous but that it is consciously connected to the religious or ecclesial community in which the motivation, method, and reason for care are modeled and learned. That the modifier “pastoral” has come to signify sensitivity in many people’s mind or one particular kind of caring, namely, kindheartedness, is one of the shortcomings of the term “pastoral care.” Although legitimate, important, and necessary this is only one expression of care. Whereas genuine care is always solicitous, it need not always be overtly tender as we realize when we consider pastoral care as a prophetic responsibility or when we take into account the prophetic dimensions of pastoral care. Too often in the past the meaning of care tended to be interpreted as, if not exhausted by, terms like comforting, nurturing or sustaining.²⁸ What makes care *pastoral*

²⁷Ibid., 12.

²⁸Gerkin, *Introduction*, 26. Charles Gerkin is just one person among many who have called for a more expansive understanding and practice of pastoral care. In his book, *Introduction to Pastoral Care*, Gerkin highlights three distinct and traditional modes of pastoral care that are biblically based and have been practiced to varying degrees and lengths of time by Jewish and Christian communities. These expressions of care are associated with three primordial ancestral role models: the prophets, the priests, and the wise ones. As an outgrowth of this present work, I can imagine a fourfold conception and practice of

is not that its manner is characterized by tenderness, or that its direction is toward persons of faith, or that its aim is to cultivate and support faith, or that its practice is located exclusively within the faith community. What makes care pastoral is that its impetus and enactment are consciously rooted in the affirmations of that community and carried out by members of that community who are formally or informally charged to do so.²⁹

Pastoral care is spiritual care offered to people, whether part of the faith community or not, in the name of the community of faith by whom it is commissioned and to whom it is accountable.

There appears to be a shared and emerging vision today among many Catholics, mainline Protestants, and Jews that allows and calls for caregiving to those outside of one's faith tradition or of no expressed religious persuasion that is simply the enactment of care as the necessary and imperative expression of one's faith and not the overt or covert means by which to proselytize or evangelize others. In this sense, pastoral care is the intentional and compassionate ministry of loving presence whereby a person or community of faith accompanies, attends to, guides, and supports other people who either are (a) consciously trying to live by the fundamental principles and core beliefs of their faith, (b) unconsciously desiring and struggling to live lives that are meaningful, dignified, and fulfilling, or (c) emotionally, psychologically, physically, or economically limited in their ability to pursue the fullness of life. Pastoral care is the ministry of

care that includes the mystical, the sacramental, the pastoral, and the prophetic and that is oriented toward the cosmic which contains them all.

²⁹From a Catholic perspective, I see no problem with extending the ministry of pastoral care to all fully initiated laity. It not only is their right and privilege but also their responsibility by virtue of their baptism. In no way should this denigrate, threaten, or replace the formal, ritual charge of the ordained minister or the professionally-trained lay minister to offer pastoral care. It is the special responsibility of the leaders of faith communities, ordained or not, to call forth, encourage, guide, and support others in becoming caregivers by virtue of the affirmations and obligations of their faith. Ideally, we do not want caregivers but rather caregiving communities.

compassionate action that emerges from the doing of pastoral theology and that, in turn, re-informs and re-envisions that theological reflection and makes it both spiritual and practical. Rather than limited to a few “helping acts,” the functions of pastoral care are conceivably as varied as the human needs that set them in motion and as many as the human means to communicate loving concern. Whereas spiritual care is care that is consciously connected to God, pastoral care is care that is consciously connected to the community of faith who, united by a common experience and the ritual action that gives expression to that experience, believe they live and move and have their being in and through God. Whereas spiritual care is not necessarily pastoral care, pastoral care is necessarily and always spiritual. The motivation for spiritual and pastoral care is the experience of the persistent and passionate love of God and the purpose is to embody and extend that love to others in order to evoke, encourage, and support full human living, which from the perspective of faith is called holiness. Thus, fully understood, pastoral care is a ministry that is evocative, formative, sympathetic, and transformative.

The Theological Underpinnings of a Mystical-Prophetic Pastoral Care

The articulation of a theology of care is necessary and helpful for people of faith as they extend care to others as part of the implications and imperatives of that faith. Although thought does not replace action, ideally every person of faith will give consideration to why, how, and to what end they offer care. A carefully considered and prayerfully developed theology of care is especially required of and essential for every pastor, rabbi, priest, chaplain, pastoral counselor, spiritual director, and lay ecclesial minister or volunteer who regularly offers care in the name of the community of faith. Each pastoral leader, caregiver, and spiritual guide should have thought through and

formulated at the level appropriate to their ability and charge, a working theology, theological anthropology, ecclesiology, soteriology, and cosmology and continue to wrestle with how each relates to the act of care and vice versa. Such an articulation, grounded in serious theological reflection about the motivation, task, method, and purpose of care, is not a luxury but a necessary component to the formation and practice of a gracious, dignified, responsible, and vigorous pastoral care. Such reflection and articulation will more likely steer caregivers away from avoidable missteps, private agendas, manipulation, or the abuse of power, and translate into healthy, reverent, and caring pastoral encounters and responses that are called forth by a variety of persons and a plethora of situations.

A mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral theology and care inspired by the writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel is grounded in and guided by six fundamental theological principles. These principles receive special emphasis by Heschel who rekindles and imaginatively transposes them for modern times. Expounded upon in the previous chapters, these core convictions complemented by the views of our dialogue partners are the theoretical and theological bases not only for a mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care but also for a mystical-prophetic *approach to life* which caregivers are called to cultivate and support. As the fundamental underpinnings, they provide the foundation for both an understanding of God and an understanding of humankind that will inform and guide our care.

Formulated as assertions these core principles are: First, creation is a free act of divine love; second, the human person possesses an inherent dignity that is traced to being created in the image of God; third, the intention and action of the original creative

act is oriented toward relationship between God and the universe, especially manifested in the divine-human relationship, and there most definitively as divine pathos (God's concern for the world) and human sympathy (human concern for God); fourth, the human person is created for significant being; fifth, the ongoing commitment to live out the above points is what is meant by holiness, and finally from the perspective of faith and as a constitutive dimension of holiness, all human actions are to be understood as and done "in the service of the cosmos for the sake of God" in the grateful and reverent awareness that the meaning of human life lies in the privilege and responsibility to cooperate with God in the perfection and redemption of the universe.³⁰

Before explicating a mystical approach to care, let us first consider the above six statements in light of the ministry of pastoral care, addressing the first three in somewhat more detail than the latter three which we will look at later in greater depth.

A Theology of Care

Free Act of Love

The first teaching in the Bible, Heschel notes, is the idea of creation. One of the central and most compelling ideas in Judaism, he insists, is that freedom, not necessity, is the source of all being. What is paramount is the understanding that the universe is created not caused. The Bible is not interested in ontology as metaphysics but rather in creation as history freely initiated by God. Creation is not an ontological necessity but a divine decision, and when translated into an eternal principle, creation means the freedom of God. When translated further to the practice of care this principle means that persons,

³⁰See Heschel, Earth is the Lord's, 62, 72, and Israel, 160-61.

bearing a resemblance to God, are “free to act in freedom and free to forfeit freedom.”³¹

Human freedom, grounded in the freedom of God, resembles God’s freedom in that it is not a given, not a continual fixed state of being but a deliberate, intentional act. Put succinctly, people are free to care or not care.

Whereas Heschel emphasizes that creation signals most definitively the dimension of divine freedom, Matthew Fox, who constructs his theological theory and praxis around the idea of creation, stresses that the active, playful, and creative energy of God (*dabhar*) is principally a gesture of divine blessing. He writes:

Creation spirituality is not centered in psychology, for it is not about the human isolated from *all* our relations. It is, however, blessing-centered, where *blessing* means the gift that all creation is.³²

In his earlier work, Original Blessing, Fox emphasizes:

Blessing is the word behind the word, the desire behind the creation. For God, the Creator, like any artist, is not indifferent or neutral to his/her work of art. Like any parent, God loves her creation and that love which is an unconditional sending forth into existence is blessing.³³

Thus, for Fox, blessing refers not only to the love of creation and creatures but also to the original desire that preceded and motivated creation in the first place. Creation is the physical manifestation of the original divine blessing and gratuity of God which is love. God does not just love what God creates. God creates because God loves. Viewing creation as an act of divine freedom, Heschel also understands that free act to be fundamentally one of generous love. In God In Search of Man, Heschel stresses that the

³¹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 412.

³²Fox, Creation Spirituality, 11.

³³*Ibid.*, 44.

originating and ongoing divine freedom is concretized by God's "personal concern for being."³⁴

Although in the Zohar the relationship between God and the world is not the relationship of Creator and creature as in the Torah, there is within Lurianic kabbalism an interpretation of *tzimtzum*, by Luria's disciple Hayim Vital, which corresponds to the above affirmation. In his work, Tree of Life, Vital interprets the reason for *tzimtzum*, the initial withdrawal and movement of the divine creative action, not primarily as a necessary and fundamental crisis within God, but as "a free act of love" even as it also unleashes the powers of stern judgment.³⁵ In this view, the primary reason for the primordial divine withdrawal is to benefit and make room for other life.

A theology that inspires and guides an approach to pastoral care and grounds its practice begins by identifying the original divine act of creation as, first and foremost, a free act of love. Whether viewed as *tzimtzum* as in Lurianic Kabbalah, as the primordial speaking of the cosmos into being as in Genesis 1:-2:4a, or as the exhalation of the divine breath (*ruah*) into the nostrils of *adam* in Genesis 2:7, the primal creative act is the first inter-active expression of love. The original divine action is not so much *creatio ex nihilo* as it is *creatio ex amor*. The initial divine labor, the original "extravagant gesture" of God, to use Annie Dillard's evocative term, is a labor of love motivated by love for the sake of love.³⁶ In Chapter Two we recall that McNamara, as a representative contemplative voice, insists that mysticism is fundamentally about love. So too, the

³⁴Heschel, God in Search of Man, 413.

³⁵Blumenthal, Understanding Jewish Mysticism, 163.

³⁶Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), 9.

deliberate practice of care is fundamentally a work of love compelled by love for the purpose of love. One pastoral theologian, Alastair Campbell, goes so far as to claim:

Pastoral care, in essence, is surprisingly simple. It has one fundamental aim: to help people to know love, both as something to be received and as something to give.³⁷

Just as creation is at the same time a free act and an act of love, so too is authentic and transformative pastoral care. Due to the awareness and appreciation of this extravagant gesture as the material expression of God's love, creation, according to Fox, is what the mystic is awakened to and what the prophet fights to sustain.³⁸ As Heschel makes clear, the wonder of creation is an allusion to the loving Creator.

As the original act of love, and later as an act of covenant, creation is not a once-upon-a-time event but rather God's free and continual decision to bring the world into existence and to offer personal concern for being. Heschel writes: "God called the world into being, and that call goes on. There is this present moment because God is present. Every instant is an act of creation," and we can infer, an act of divine love and care.³⁹ Every moment of creation is a sign of God's ongoing, abiding presence and a conscious act of divine love. Analogously, the conscious act of human care is an allusion to the free, extravagant, generative, and loving presence of God. Since creation, whether as understood in the Bible or in kabbalistic cosmogony, is an act of expression as well as a continuous process by which God is lovingly present, caregiving is the expression of God's continuous presence and infinite love. More so, the very act of caregiving is

³⁷ Alastair V. Campbell, Paid to Care? (London: SPCK, 1985), 1.

³⁸ Fox, Creation Spirituality, 10.

³⁹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1951), 100.

fundamentally creative and possesses the capacity and hidden power to make new things happen. In kabbalistic language, each act of care is a participation in the ongoing creative action of God who is “making all things new”⁴⁰ in love. Each act of care serves to “raise the sparks” and thereby to contribute to the ongoing recreation of the cosmos. As noted in previous chapters, Heschel understands the ongoing event of creation (re-creation) to be synonymous with the redemption (*geulah*) in which humans are invited to be God’s partner. Fox holds a similar view. He writes:

Creation is original blessing, and all the subsequent blessings—those we give our loved ones and those we struggle to bring about by healing, celebration, and justice-making—are prefigured in the original blessing that creation is, a blessing so thoroughly unconditional, so fully graced, that we go through life hardly noticing it at all⁴¹

Put simply, the original and ongoing motive force as well as the purpose for pastoral care is love.⁴² To locate the motivation and purpose for pastoral care in the free, beatitudinal act of creation which is, above all, an act of love means, first, that pastoral care is not merely or primarily another “helping profession” but rather the embodiment and expression of divine love extended to others, and second, that as such it involves the willing participation with God in the ongoing event of creation. Because creation is not a once-in-time event but the continual unfolding of life, caregivers (and all humans) are invited to participate with God in the ongoing drama of creation, which is another way of saying, the ongoing drama of love.

⁴⁰Rev. 21:5.

⁴¹Fox, *Creation Spirituality*, 11.

⁴²Although saying so may offend the sensibilities of some practitioners, be they psychologists, psychiatrists, or pastoral counselors, striking them as being simplistic or vague, a mystical understanding of and orientation to pastoral care means love is not only the motivation, but also the task, method, and purpose of care.

Sacred Image

Intimately related to the idea that creation is the free act of God's love and that pastoral care is the extension of that creative love is the conviction that the human person is the sacred image of God (Hebrew, *tselem elohim*; Latin, *imago Dei*). For Heschel, this is critical for understanding God, the human person, and the divine-human relationship. For our purposes, it is also indispensable to our understanding of pastoral care.⁴³ Along with the conviction that creation is an act of divine love, belief in the sacred image of humankind also points to a fundamental motivation for care that is intrinsically spiritual and pastoral in nature. According to Heschel, and gleaned from the curriculum vitae that was his faith touching real life, for example, speaking out on behalf of the elderly, children and youth, the sick and infirm, oppressed Soviet Jewry and African-Americans, speaking out against the Vietnam War and religious intolerance—all acts of loving kindness, compassion, and justice are rooted in two insights: the recognition of the human person's sacred lineage and the conviction that God is involved in and concerned

⁴³However fundamental the anthropological symbol of *imago Dei* is within the Jewish and Christian traditions, there have been several theological problems and differences among traditions as they understand and apply this doctrine. It is peripheral to this project to exegete the two accounts of creation in the Bible, the Priestly (Gen. 1-2:4a) and the Yahwist (Gen. 2b-24), or to address the problems around the interpretation of humankind's "dominion over" (1:28) or to speak to the historical interpretations of these accounts that denigrate women's status either by blame for "the Fall" of humanity or by claiming an inequality between men and women, or to note how the different religious traditions tended to interpret the effect of human sin on the *imago Dei*. Suffice it to say, in my opinion, an integral pastoral theology and care, one that is substantive enough to speak to relational issues and environmental concerns of today must view the sacred image of humanity as a call to mutuality among genders and all people, as well as to respect and care for the environment. As for Heschel, his work preceded the modern day environmental movement. He does hold to an exalted view of humanity (in the order of creation), and although he does make a strong distinction between Creator and creation and was conscious of and opposed to modern versions of pantheism, the thrust of his theological vision seems to suggest mutual reverence in all human relationships and loving care for all of creation. For the purposes of this paper, I simply use the symbol of *imago Dei* as explicated above and acknowledge these historical problems and theological differences. For a summary of these issues and differences, see Mary Catherine Hilkert, "Imago Dei," in Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 535-37. For one discussion of how these issues and differences relate to pastoral care, see Leroy T. Howe, *Image of God: A Theology for Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

about the life of humankind. There are two issues here as this pertains to pastoral care: one relates to those to whom care is offered, and the other applies to those offering care.

First, to be created in the image of God means that each and every person is inherently dignified (from Latin *dignitas*, from *dignus*, worthy), noble, esteemed, and therefore is precious and of inestimable worth in the eyes of God. This means that each and every human person is inherently worthy of receiving love and care and therefore should be loved and cared for. Heschel writes:

Human life is holy, holier even than the scrolls of the Torah. Its holiness is not man's achievement; it is a gift of God rather than attained through merit. Man must, therefore, be treated with the honor due to a likeness representing the King of kings.

Not that the Bible was unaware of man's frailty and wickedness. The Divine in man is not by virtue of what he does but by virtue of what he is.⁴⁴

Heschel insists Judaism holds that we must love humans because they are made in the image of God. He cautions against spiritualizing this imperative, stating that not only the soul of persons but also the body is endowed with divine dignity.⁴⁵ In other words, for Heschel, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the image of God is not something *in* the human, and there in some rare, as-of-yet- uncontaminated part of the human person. Rather, it is the whole person and all human beings who are the image of God and therefore worthy of care. He writes:

The basic dignity of man is not made up of his achievements, virtues, or special talents. It is inherent in his very being. The commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) calls upon us to love not only the virtuous and the wise but also the vicious and the stupid man. The

⁴⁴Heschel, Quest for God, 124.

⁴⁵Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man," in Insecurity of Freedom, 53. Heschel is not suggesting humans bear a physical resemblance to God, only that the body is not inherently antithetical to the spiritual.

rabbis have, indeed, interpreted the commandments to imply that even a criminal remains our neighbor.⁴⁶

From a biblical perspective, Heschel maintains, it is impossible to conceive of humanity in isolation. Rather, the human person is always understood in relation to God in whose image men and women are made and from whom life is given transcendent meaning in and through divine pathos. He writes:

The future of the human species depends upon our degree of reverence for the individual man. And the strength and validity of that reverence depend upon our faith in God's concern for man. . . .

Only if there is a God who cares, a God to whom the life of every individual is an event—and not only a part of an infinite process—then our sense for the sanctity and preciousness of the individual man may be maintained.⁴⁷

Humanity's sacred image is not accidental. It is the result and sure sign of God's care.

God does not care for humankind because we are made in God's image and likeness. We are made in God's image and likeness because God cares. That humankind is the image of God is the call for care. To withhold care is an offense against God and humanity.

Second, it is by virtue of being the sacred image of God that humans, especially caregivers, are compelled to live responsibly and compassionately, recognizing, valuing, and responding to the preciousness of each person. Awareness of the other as divine image is an invitation to sympathy and care. Not to care for others is also a violation against oneself as sacred image. Awareness of oneself as divine image is an imperative to care. Heschel explains this imperative. He writes:

Man is not valued in physical terms; his value is infinite. To our common sense, one human being is less than two human beings. Jewish tradition tries to teach us that for him who has caused a single soul to perish, it is as

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man," in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 161.

though he had caused a whole world to perish; and that for him who has saved a single soul, it is as though he has saved a whole world.⁴⁸

In light of this sentiment in which the common deed is exalted, every encounter in pastoral caregiving or counseling, no matter how seemingly insignificant or imperfect is elevated to sacred (and cosmic) significance. Each pastoral encounter is a unique moment in creation in which the caregiver has the opportunity of evoking from people, the charge of reminding people of, and the honor of introducing people to, their divine dignity. Whether by comforting and encouraging words, a knowing nod, simple compassionate presence in a time of great anguish or grief, an act of intervention or empowerment in a counseling session, a simple but kind gesture, or paying someone's heating bill, in the face of human fragility or failure caregivers can be living reminders of each person's secret and sacred nobility by enacting their own sacred dignity.

Heschel maintains the meaning of "the divine image and likeness" lies in "the question which it comes to answer," claiming that unlike the religious thinking of Babylonia and other peoples of the time and vicinity who tended to focus on death and immortality, the central concern of the Bible is not how to escape death but rather how to sanctify life.⁴⁹ He explains, "the divine image and likeness does not serve man to attain immortality but to attain sanctity."⁵⁰ As it translates for pastoral caregivers, this means that they extend care as a basic requirement and expression of their own innate, divine dignity which compels them to live out what they have in common with God. In so doing, caregivers participate in the sanctification of their lives, while by their care they invite

⁴⁸Ibid., 154.

⁴⁹Ibid., 152.

⁵⁰Ibid.

others, however indirectly or unnoticeably, to consider the mystery and meaning of their lives as well. For Heschel, the sacred image is an image of divine love. He stresses, “The image-love is a love of what God loves, an act of sympathy, of participation in God’s love.”⁵¹ A mystical-prophetic pastoral care is one in which caregivers knowingly, gratefully, and responsibly participate in God’s love by refracting that love to others. For the caregiver, it is important to keep in mind the interpretation noted above that the sacred image of humankind implies not so much *an analogy of being* but *an analogy of doing*. As quoted previously, Heschel states, “Man is called upon to act in likeness of God. ‘As He is merciful, be thou merciful.’”⁵²

According to Heschel, Judaism “is a system in which human relations rest upon two basic ideas: the idea of human rights and the idea of human obligation.”⁵³ So, the sacred image of humankind impacts pastoral care, on the one hand, in terms of those to whom care is extended by virtue of the fact that it is the inalienable right of each and every person given their transcendent dignity as human beings and, on the other hand, in terms of the caregivers who are called and charged to love and to offer care to others by virtue of the fact that their own transcendent dignity includes an incredible responsibility and implies an awesome opportunity.

⁵¹Ibid., 153.

⁵²Ibid., 161.

⁵³Heschel, “No Time for Neutrality,” in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 75.

Relationship

To locate the spiritual roots of care in the primordial act of creative love also means that care necessarily involves relationship. Heschel states, “The central thought of Judaism is *the living God*.”⁵⁴ A theology of care inspired by Heschel’s vision grounds the practice of care in the living God’s desire for relationship and is best captured in the words *presence* and *pathos*. Creation is the loving movement of God’s ongoing revelation directed toward relationship with humanity. Human faith is the reciprocal movement and the unfolding experience of God from allusiveness to presence to pathos. For Heschel, four pivotal events—creation, the exodus, the covenant, and the exile of the people who are accompanied by the *Shekinah*—especially attest to divine presence and pathos and capture the central message of the Bible: “God is involved in the life of man. A personal relationship, an intimate concern binds Him to mankind.”⁵⁵

Matthew Fox, in particular, concurs with Heschel’s emphasis that *being* is not merely an ontological given but the dynamism of relationality. Influenced by the thirteenth century Dominican, Meister Eckhart, who like the kabbalists believed not only that creation is ongoing but also that what God is creating in the world God is also creating in the innermost and deepest realms of the soul, Fox writes:

Creation, then, at its core, is about relation. It is the spiraling, dancing, crouching, springing, leaping, surprising act of relatedness, communing, of responding, of letting go, of being. Being is about relation. . . . In this sense, sin is a turning away from creation and its author, the divine one who dwells in all things.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 25.

⁵⁵Heschel, “Sacred Image of Man,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 160. In addition to these events, Christians understand the mystery of the Trinity and the incarnation as expressing the relationality of God. In particular, Jesus is believed to embody and symbolize the divine desire and decision to be in relationship with humanity and the invitation to relationship offered to humanity by God.

⁵⁶Fox, *Creation Spirituality*, 9.

For Heschel, the biblical accounts of the free act of creation signal the divine desire and intent for relationship with the universe, and in particular with humankind as the sacred image. In the two accounts of creation, the Priestly (Gen. 1:2:4a) and the Yahwist (Gen 2:4b-25), the concept of relationship is central. The intensity and intimacy of the divine-human relationship is seen, for example, when the Creator breathes the divine breath (*ruah*) into the nostrils of the primordial earth-creature, giving the creature life and thus making the creature a human being (Gen 2:7). In Judaism, whether in the revelational view of the Bible depicted as the connection between Creator and creature/creation or the contraction-emanational view of kabbalism depicted as energy in motion and flow between *Ein Sof* and the *sefirot* and the lower worlds, creation bespeaks relationship.

In addition to the biblical accounts of creation, the verbs in Ex. 3:7-12a clearly indicate that it is the pathos of God that sets in motion the Exodus event and that is at the heart of the divine-human relationship.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey . . . The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you."

Similarly, the account of the giving of the covenant on Mt. Sinai attests to God's persistent desire for relationship. "Man is not alone," Heschel insists, because God is

unwilling to be alone. Using the language of marital engagement and partnership to convey the special intimacy of this relationship, Heschel writes:

Sinai, the decisive moment in Israel's history, initiated a new relationship between God and man: God became engaged to a people. Israel accepted the new relationship; it became engaged to God. It was an event to which both were partners. God gave His word to Israel, and Israel gave its word of honor to God.⁵⁷

For Heschel, God is "a lover engaged to his people, not only a king. God stands in passionate relationship to man."⁵⁸ The covenant is the culmination of the call to relationship begun in the original creative act of God. Created in the image of God who deliberately chooses to be relational, humans are constituted and intended for relationship.⁵⁹ Thus, creation was and is not just a generative act but a relational act and as such is an invitation to a partnership established in and sustained by divine love. The covenant is the re-presentation and renewal of creation that is the ongoing invitation to participate in the divine-human exchange of life and love.

From a prophetic perspective the divine-human covenantal relationship is not only an invitation to turn toward and inter-act with God, but more specifically to concern oneself with what concerns God, to sympathize with divine pathos. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, the ongoing nature of creation renewed and recreated as covenant means humans are intended to develop an appropriate, reverent, compassionate, and responsible rapport not only with God, but with other human persons and all of creation. That God is passionately involved with all of life, with all of creation and not just with

⁵⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 214.

⁵⁸Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man," in Insecurity of Freedom, 160.

⁵⁹Again, for Heschel, God is not relational by nature, that is, naturally or necessarily. Rather, God is relational by choice.

humankind, that humans are called into partnership with God, and that as images of God humans are intended to fulfill an analogy of doing, means that human being comes with the imperative to be in relationship with and to care for something and someone other than oneself. Thus, at its most basic level, if not at its most profound, the enactment of pastoral care is relational while its concern is relationship. It involves making connections. Pastoral theologian Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, writes:

In short, pastoral care is an outreach of compassion often accompanied by an action of care. That action can be as ordinary as offering food to someone who is isolated and lonely or as complicated as intervening in a medical crisis.⁶⁰

Heschel maintains that the opportunity for and openness to creative, loving relationship is one thing God and humankind have in common which is to say that they share a concern and a task. Rooted in the relationality of God, of which pathos is the supreme expression, offering compassionate presence and loving care is the privileged and obligatory way caregivers act in the likeness of God and live out their end of the covenant. However brief, whether seemingly insignificant or decidedly profound, however one-sided or interactive, every pastoral encounter is a call to relationship and reenacts the free creative, loving relationship between God and humankind.

Significant Being

A mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral care means cultivating a theological humanism. In Judaism, theological humanism translates into participation with God in the mending of the human soul (*tikkun ha nephesh*) and the mending of the world (*tikkun ha olam*). In Christianity, it is rendered as the ongoing process of *Christening* or *Christification*, that is, the transformation of the person and world into the mind and heart

⁶⁰Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, *A Primer in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 17.

of Christ. In Heschel's theology, the natural result of humankind being created in an act of love, as the sacred image, for the purpose of being in an intimate partnership with God which calls them to act in God's likeness by caring for others, is the conviction that humankind is called to and has the capacity for significant being. Heschel asserts, "The quest for significant being is the heart of existence."⁶¹ What makes being significant is both its loving source and its transcendent potential. It refers to the flowering of our basic goodness implanted in our being by God. Pastoral care is care for significant being. Just as a theology of care is rooted in humankind being a sacred image, so too it is expressed in the awareness and actualization of humanity's potential for transcendent living.

For Heschel, the primal sin is not so much pride understood as the desire to be God as it is the refusal to be human (or more than human, as he sometimes says).⁶² Human being is not enough to guarantee one's humanity. Merely being *homo sapiens* bipeds who eat, sleep, defecate, have sex, and go to work, is a contradiction and violation of the full humanity available to and intended for human beings by God. Significant being happens when humans act on the realization that there is a difference between human being and being human. Whereas human being is a given, being (or becoming) human is a transcendent vocation, a graced responsibility, a holy task, a noble and difficult path, and a blessed destiny. A theology of care that is mystical and prophetic directs care toward personal and communal depth and cultivates, attends to, and supports a sense of significant being. What makes human being significant, Heschel explains, is first the fact that God is in search of humanity (pathos); second, that God calls

⁶¹Heschel, Who Is Man?, 57.

⁶²Heschel, God in Search of Man, 399.

humankind to an intimate, passionate partnership, third, the intentional and continuous recentering of subjectivity from self to God, and fourth, the actualization of living beyond oneself and caring for others.⁶³ Mystical-prophetic care in particular is aimed at inviting and supporting significant being.

Spiritual or pastoral care is offered in the hopes of calling forth from people the dormant dream of or unspoken yearning for significant being and transcendent meaning which is the natural outgrowth of the seed of sacred significance from which each human person buds and blossoms. Often traumatic experiences, painful memories, the usual and uncommon failures, broken relationships, and the tedium or torment of the daily grind prevent people from believing in, imagining, or experiencing significant being. To believe in the sacred image of humanity, to live by the conviction that every person is intended and created for significant being, means that each act of compassionate care, not just in theory but in reality, is a living reminder to the recipient of that care that they matter, that they are significant, and is a hint that their lives bear hidden and holy meaning. One aim of a mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral care is to awaken in people a sense of significant being through contemplative presence and gestures of compassionate care.

Holiness

Significant being is the result of actualizing the awareness that “the human can become holy.”⁶⁴ Human life is holy because humankind is a divine concern. For Heschel, the movement toward significant being, that is, the human person becoming fully alive, is

⁶³Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, 4.

⁶⁴Heschel, “Sacred Image of Man,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 156.

not possible apart from God's free and personal concern for being.⁶⁵ This is why to become human is to become holy, why the practice of humanization is the way of sanctification, and vice versa, because in the recentering of subjectivity from self to God, human persons become more not less who they were created and intended to be by God who is their loving source. Furthermore, what ennobles life, what alone makes it commensurate with the person being a sacred image, what gives life transcendent value and meaning, Heschel claims, is not merely the fact that holiness is possible but rather that holiness is expected and commanded.

You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.
(Leviticus 19:2)

For Heschel, the fact that God asks something of humankind, that God expects and needs humans to be righteous, is not evidence that God is an overbearing taskmaster, a severe and demanding boss, but rather is proof of God's extravagant love and the generous call to partnership. Holiness is a divine imperative, not a human accomplishment. It is a gift, not an achievement. Yet paradoxically, it is a gift whose beauty and goodness are only fully received and realized as it is responded to, for holiness is not a thing—neither an award nor a reward—but the total, passionate involvement in the partnership offered to humankind by God. Holiness is the name for the intentional and faithful human involvement in this supreme partnership. Thus, it is not like a destination we set out for and at which one day we arrive or a goal we set and finally meet. The way *to* faith is the way *of* faith, the way *to* God is the way *of* God, Heschel explains. The way to holiness is the realization that holiness is the way.

⁶⁵Heschel, God in Search of Man, 412-13.

To say that pastoral care is intended to cultivate and support significant being means that the purpose of pastoral care is the care of souls, that is, helping persons and communities become wholly alive and thus holy. Life is both inherently and potentially holy: *inherently* holy because God who alone is Holy initiates a relationship with humankind and invites humankind into a passionate partnership; *potentially* holy because humans must choose daily to fulfill their end of the partnership and to live in a certain way. Holiness is the ongoing commitment to human becoming, to the increasing actualization of one's sense of significant being as that significance is related specifically to the God who is its source, way, and fulfillment. In "a simple twist of fate," Heschel suggests, humanity not so much needs God as humanity needs to be needed in order to find meaning and to become holy. He writes:

The feeling of futility that comes with the sense of being useless, of not being needed in the world, is the most common cause of psychoneurosis. The only way to avoid despair is *to be a need* rather than an end. *Happiness*, in fact, may be defined as the *certainty of being needed*. But *who* is in need of man?⁶⁶

He reiterates the answer: "God is in need of man's share in redemption."⁶⁷

Holiness is the name for the dynamic, ongoing shift from self-consciousness to self-surrender which reconfigures life so that God is the center toward which all forces tend. Holiness is experienced by cultivating and living out the mystical and prophetic expressions of faith, each of which in its own way, encourages and facilitates human persons becoming who they truly are. On the one hand, mystics experience the transformation of consciousness necessary for a greater sense of significant being by being open to the ineffable, to mystery, to the presence of God which the sublime and

⁶⁶Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 194.

⁶⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 156.

mystery insinuate, and to the human responses they elicit: existential humility, radical amazement, indebtedness, gratefulness, praise, and faith. On the other hand, prophets experience the recentering of their subjectivity by being open to and oriented toward the pathos of God and to the corresponding human responses this evokes: feeling *for* God and feeling *with* God, compassion for others, concern for justice for all persons, sympathy for all things and kinship with all life forms, and the performance of holy deeds as single acts that play an integral part in the long drama of redemption.

Since care for the person means care for the soul (significant being and holiness) and because care for the soul means care for the world that the soul inhabits (justice and *tikkun*), a theology of care that is inspired by Heschel's vision, and thereby mystical and prophetic in its approach, means that there is an intimate, dynamic, and mutual relationship between the contemplative and active dimensions of faith, between cultivating wonder and awe and harvesting sympathy and compassion. Holiness is the human response to the gratuitousness of God's love (the mystical way) and the demands this love makes (the prophetic way), and is expressed most fully in a faithful dialectic in which apparent opposites are held in dynamic tension, for example, radical amazement and human sympathy, the mystical and the prophetic, solitude and solidarity, the thought of God and the thought of the world.

The mystic and the prophet share much in common. They are not the antithesis of each other. They are partners in the movement of authentic piety toward God who is at the center. They move toward the center from different starting points. The mystic is the prophet listening. The prophet is the mystic acting. The mystic is the prophet whose deed appears in the form of prayer. The prophet is the mystic whose prayer appears in the form

of a deed. For instance, while Dorothee Soelle claims mysticism *is* resistance, Matthew Fox maintains that the name of love today, above all else, is justice. A theology of care, as opposed to, for example, a philosophy or psychology or sociology of care, is oriented toward fostering human holiness and mending the broken cosmos. Therefore, the only practically compelling and spiritually efficacious care aims to invite and support in people and communities both the mystic and the prophet.⁶⁸

Tikkun

Finally, a theology of care inspired by Heschel's work necessarily includes the concept of *tikkun ha olam*, which fleshes out the requirements and implications of divine pathos, *tzimtzum*, and the call to holiness. In addition, it expands the notion of care. In a mystical-prophetic approach to care, the cultivation of a thoroughly mystical consciousness and engagement in life fosters a sense of the connectedness of all life and the kinship of all beings and thus elicits the concern and sense of responsibility for all life.

A theology of care based on Heschel's vision is rooted in the transitive concern of the divine that evokes a bearing in life that is characterized by human sympathy and concern for others. For Heschel, the distinguishing mark of a spirituality with integrity and maturity is a life that bears witness to "the three dimensions of a mature human concern," namely, love of God with all one's heart, soul, and strength, and love of neighbor as oneself.⁶⁹ We have seen that transcendental living occurs in the deliberate, ongoing shift of subjectivity from self to God. Again, here we see how sanctification is

⁶⁸See Katherine Marie Dyckman and L. Patrick Carroll, Inviting the Mystic, Supporting the Prophet: An Introduction to Spiritual Direction (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

⁶⁹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 139.

humanization since the effect and extension of focusing on God “is becoming sensitive to the interests of other selves.”⁷⁰ Heschel baldly states, “Human is he who is concerned with other selves.”⁷¹ He insists “a vital requirement of human life is transitive concern, a regard for others, in addition to a reflexive concern, an intense regard for itself.”⁷² Conversely, “true love of man,” he asserts, “is clandestine love of God.”⁷³ But Heschel’s vision of care does not stop at other humans but moves even further outward to include the entire world as humanity enacts its end of the divine-human partnership by being compassionate toward and concerned about the restoration of the cosmos in God. Thus, pastoral care is not only social, it is cosmic in scope, with every act of loving care serving to redeem the sparks scattered throughout the world.

A passionately prophetic consciousness that is formed by attuning oneself to what concerns God, necessarily manifests itself in holy deeds that are the requisite expression of participating in the justice of God, the mending of the world, and the restoration of the original unity. What begins in *tzimtzum*, in God’s act of self-limitation on behalf of the other, ends in the cooperative divine-human venture of *tikkun ha olam* which is one way humankind practices the same consecrated regard for the other. Heschel writes:

Dark is the world to me, for all of its cities and stars, if not for the breath of compassion that God blew in me when he formed me of dust and clay, more compassion than my nerves can bear.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Ibid., 138.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., 139.

⁷⁴Ibid., 147.

Heschel's spiritual vision requires incorporating *tikkun ha olam* into the theology of care where it acts as an impetus for imagining anew and enlarging the purpose of pastoral care, dignifying and exalting its task even more.

A Mystical-Prophetic Approach to Pastoral Care

To refer to an "approach" to pastoral care signals both a way of thinking about and a way of enacting care. As an intensification of the theological vision of care expounded above, the approach I am calling for involves a specific way of perceiving and enacting care that is a dynamic synthesis of the mystical and the prophetic dimensions of faith. As alluded to and explained throughout this dissertation, and as will be explicated further below and in Chapter Eight, *mystical* and *prophetic* refer to two unique but interrelated ways of conceiving of and engaging in the realities of life and of experiencing and relating to God. Mystical-prophetic caregivers hope to incorporate the core insights and truths of each way into their own lives and to integrate those truths and insights into the ongoing action of care on behalf of others and the world. When the *mystical* dimension of faith is transposed into a particular understanding and enactment of care its tenor and task is one that we can identify as *evocative* and *formational*. When the *prophetic* dimension of faith is transposed into a specific understanding and enactment of care its tenor and task is one that I call *sympathetic* and *transformational*.

We will now turn our attention to the first of these two complementary expressions of care, and the focus of this chapter, namely, the mystical.

A Mystical Approach to Pastoral Care

The Way of the Mystic

First, let us identify what mysticism is not. As presented and conceived of in this dissertation, mysticism is not escapism disguised in religious garb. As McNamara likes to say, it is not “tripping out,” it is “standing in.” It is neither a state of inward torpor nor a state of ecstasy. It does not refer to altered states of consciousness, charismatic gifts, external or internal visions, locutions, or relaxation techniques. The mystic is not characterized by “parapsychological phenomenon such as precognition, knowledge of events at a distance, control over bodily processes such as heartbeat and breathing, out-of-body experiences, levitation, and other extraordinary sensory or psychic phenomenon.”⁷⁵

In actuality, the mystic or contemplative is the man or woman who is intensely and intentionally alive to the aliveness of God. Mysticism or contemplation is “the wordless awareness of oneness with God beyond what thoughts can grasp or words can adequately convey.”⁷⁶ The mystic is acutely conscious of living in proximity to God, in the neighborhood of God. It is this felt presence and awareness of the nearness of God experienced as a living relationship that endows existence with ultimate significance and makes life holy. The mystical life is life lived fully alive to the gratuitousness of God and to the grandeur of all reality. Beginning with the humble and wondrous surprise of being, the mystic is acutely aware and appreciative of all that is. “The truth of human being,”

⁷⁵Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart, 7.

⁷⁶James Finley, Christian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 1.

Heschel states, “is the love of being alive.”⁷⁷ Mysticism is “being open in a new way to every aspect of experience.”⁷⁸ Heschel points out there are three ways we may respond to the reality of the world around us: “We may exploit it, we may enjoy it, we may accept it with awe.”⁷⁹ The mystic not only enjoys the world, the mystic accepts it with awe. McNamara describes the simple awe and perceptive appreciation that is at the core of the mystic way. He writes:

To engage in the natural art of contemplation is to look long and steadily, leisurely and lovingly at anything—a tree, a child, a pear, a kitten, a hippopotamus, and really “see” the whole of it; not to steal an idea of it, but to know it by experience, a pure intuition born of love. This is not an aggressive act but gratuitous. Being discloses its hidden secrets as we look, wait, wonder, and stand in awe of it—not inquisitively but receptively. The mystic—that is, the contemplative—is never utilitarian or Machiavellian, greedily trying to get something out of everything. He simply stands before being, before the world, before the universe, before another human being, a plant, an animal. He enjoys it and leaves himself wide open to its revelation, to its disclosures of mystery, of truth, of love.⁸⁰

While seeing, feeling, and appreciating the *isness* of all reality, mystics experience everything—whether in its unique particularity or cosmic mystery—as an allusion to transcendental meaning and as a suggestiveness of a divine gratuitous personal presence. All things are vibrant with spiritual meaning and significance.⁸¹ The contemplative’s attitude toward all reality is one of wonder and reverence, aware of the spiritual value which even inanimate things possess and is alert to the sacred dignity of

⁷⁷Heschel, Who Is Man?, 35.

⁷⁸Robert McAfee Brown, “Heschel’s Social Ethics,” in Merkle, ed., Exploring His Life, 126.

⁷⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 34.

⁸⁰McNamara, Christian Mysticism, 7.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 41.

every human being.⁸² Mystics share in a passionate care for the marvel that is everywhere, have a sense of living in cosmic kinship with all beings, and enjoy a sense of the sacredness of life. The mystic

is alive to what is solemn in the simple, to what is sublime in the sensuous; but he is not aiming to penetrate into the sacred. Rather he is striving to be himself penetrated and actuated by the sacred, eager to yield to its force, to identify himself with every trend in the world which is toward the divine.⁸³

Contemplatives, in other words, are willingly susceptible to be acted upon by reality, however simple or magnificent, whether divine or human. Poor in spirit, and passionate of heart, they have a unique capacity to be moved and to respond to that which moves them.

Mystics are characterized by existential humility, openness, reverence, wonder, and awe. The ineffable in them communes with the ineffable beyond them. Marked by radical amazement, radical receptivity, and radical responsiveness, mystics take nothing for granted but understand all, including their own lives, as a gift from God. For contemplatives, all is grace. Anything they own, they owe. They place their whole life at God's disposal. They are marked by the ongoing practice of gratitude and praise, perceiving the world as a miracle, receiving life as a divine gratuity. Especially conscious of the love of the giver and identifying and experiencing the source of divine gratuity as love, mystics are above all else great lovers: lovers of life, God, creation, oneself, and others. "Contemplation is both a direct experience itself and a habituated attitude."⁸⁴ Contemplation, as a specific spiritual practice and as an interior act of faith is a way of

⁸²Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 286.

⁸³Ibid., 281.

⁸⁴James Finley, "The Contemplative Heart: A Conversation with James Finley," in Pathways for Spiritual Living, April-June, Vol.9, No. 2, 13.

experiencing oneness with God who is infinite love. As a way of life, as a way of going about one's business and living in the everyday world, as a way of engaging in ordinary or difficult human situations, contemplation or mysticism is the extension into concrete daily existence of this intuitive awareness and experience of the intimate and infinite oneness with and love of God.

Contemplation: The Response to the Current Spiritual Crisis

The spiritual exigesis of our contemporary situation offered by Heschel and our other commentators casts the predicament of human living with which caregivers are confronted in a much broader context than what takes place in the offices of rabbis, pastors, pastoral counselors, or spiritual directors. Although such an approach has implications for individual counseling and guidance, a mystical-prophetic pastoral care is first a theological commentary on and a spiritual response to the malaise of the soul that infects modern culture, especially much of the contemporary North American ethos and way of life. My contention, along with Heschel and the others, is that the ominous emotional, psychological, social, political, ecclesial, and environmental problems facing us today are at heart the symptoms of a spiritual crisis that lies deep within the contemporary human situation. Therefore, only a vision of pastoral theology and care that seeks to address the deepest source or cause of this spiritual predicament (while pastors and rabbis, psychologists and psychiatrists, pastoral counselors and spiritual directors, social workers and chaplains continue their daily routine of care) will begin to help move individual persons, communities of faith, and humanity on the whole away from this perilous situation and toward the fullness of life.

Stated more emphatically, the premise of this project, and therefore the basis of and need for a mystical-prophetic approach to care, is that only an authentic, thoroughly developed contemplative life is a potent enough antidote to begin to undo the damage and alleviate the kind of suffering that is the result of the current spiritual crisis.⁸⁵ It is also, I believe, the only truly viable and affirmative way of human living (a *via positiva*) that offers and leads to real life. The first priority of a mystical-prophetic care either to persons or within a congregational practice of pastoral care is to nurture a vital, substantive contemplative life. The long litany of woes outlined in Chapters One and Two—indifference, callousness, the increasing disinclination or outright refusal to be moved, whether by being itself, by beauty and the sublime, or by human anguish and the agony of creation; the atrophy of feeling, the growing incapacity or unwillingness to offer a total response to reality let alone to relate it to a transcendent mystery or a divine presence; the loss of a sense of humanity's sacred image, much of humankind's false sense of sovereignty especially as it manifests itself today in excessive rationalism, the force of modern technology, and unrestrained militarism and sanctioned violence; the idolization of needs, unchecked consumerism and greed, the omnipresence of narcissism, the tacit acceptance of utilitarianism, and the ever-increasing ethos of restlessness; the trivialization of life, the analgesic nature of spirituality, the failure of religion to enliven, the silent conspiracy that tolerates the dominant consciousness, the fear and denial of death; the failure to be completely awake, entirely alive, wholly appreciative, that is, the failure to move humbly yet intentionally toward the fullness of being human and holy—

⁸⁵For an example, see Claude Anshin Thomas, *At Hell's Gate: A Soldier's Story* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2004) about how the practice of Buddhism "saved" a Vietnam veteran from a life of violence and rage.

the entire catalog of these interrelated symptoms point to a modern sickness and malaise of the soul. Of course, as Heschel knows, the soul does not exist in a vacuum. Therefore, these spiritual afflictions act as the interconnected and mutually reinforcing symptoms that affect modern culture, encroaching upon psychological, social, political, economic, environmental, and global circumstances and situations.⁸⁶ A mystical-prophetic pastoral care is based on the conviction that, at its root, the soul-sickness is a spiritual dilemma not an irreconcilable “condition.”⁸⁷

Because what ails humankind is spiritual in nature, it only can be responded to adequately on the level of soul, as a matter of spirit, in the realm of human action. Take, for example, world hunger. Every night thousands upon thousands of men, woman, and children who go to bed do not wake up the next morning. They die of starvation. Yet the problem continues not because the world lacks food, not because we lack the means to grow and produce it, or the means to deliver it. Human beings starve to death daily because other human beings allow it to happen, at worst accepting it, at best ignoring it. The collective moral outrage is but a faint, muted cry of a persistent few. Hunger is a physical, local, and global emergency whose reality is rooted in a spiritual impoverishment. Thus, for communities of faith, how could world hunger be anything but an urgent issue of soul care and a matter of pastoral concern?

Therefore, what is required is a mystical and prophetic pastoral theology and care that is committed to being evocative and formational while being sympathetic and

⁸⁶See Heschel, “What Ecumenism Is,” in S. Heschel, ed. *Moral Grandeur*, 286.

⁸⁷Again, Heschel emphasizes that Judaism does not subscribe to a view of original sin whereby humanity inherits or is born into a fixed, predetermined and universal state or condition. “The soul which we receive is clean, but within it resides a power for evil,” as well as the power to do good. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 365.

transformational in its orientation. The real danger is that if we do not evoke and cultivate an authentic mystical life then human compassion and prophetic sympathy will cease being born in our time or, after being born, will atrophy and disappear altogether leaving callousness, spiritual autism, greed, and the abuse of power to rule the day.

Evocative-Formational Care

When Heschel's depth theology is transposed to the practice of pastoral theology and care, his emphasis on the requiredness of human becoming and the unique role the cultivation of pretheological attitudes plays in this holy endeavor is fundamental. Together with his theology of pathos and the relationship between inward piety and prophetic activism, this is perhaps the most important contribution of Heschel's work for an alternative conception and practice of pastoral care.⁸⁸ His theological vision regards human becoming and authentic religious existence as an ongoing, open-ended drama. However, it is not the end alone that is open and dramatic but the beginning as well. Another spiritual writer sums up well Heschel's view: "From its prenatal origins through all its maturational phases until the dissolution of death, human life is an emergent phenomenon, a mystery that gradually unfolds, a promise in process of realization."⁸⁹ Therefore, pastoral care must be conceived and carried out in a way that is not only palliative and restorative but also creative and mystical, one whose motivation, task, approach, and purpose is patently evocative and formational. A Mystical approach to care

⁸⁸ Again, wonder, awe, reverence, existential humility, surprise, indebtedness, even praise are considered antecedents of faith as well as later being constitutive expressions of faith. Thus, as I will argue, a mystical approach to care involves cultivating these pretheological, precognitive, and presymbolic attitudes.

⁸⁹ Richard Byrne, "Journey (Growth and Development in Spiritual Life," in The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, ed. Downey, 565.

is the pastoral response not only to the signs of the time but to the creative, emergent, and promissory nature of human being as well.

A Via Positiva

Since the task and purpose of soul care especially involve cultivating and supporting authentic, significant being and because, as we have seen, being or becoming human is not only the true vocation but also the life-long task of humans, and because of the crucial role cultivating the antecedents of faith plays in helping to realize transcendent living, pastoral care must be both evocative and formational in its approach and vision. That is, pastoral care necessarily involves calling forth from and helping to form in people those modes of being human that are the deepest, truest, and most noble expressions of being created in the image and likeness of God.⁹⁰ When we recover pastoral care as soul care, and understand the true aim of *cura animarum* as assisting persons and communities to become authentically human and passionately holy, then it is imperative that pastoral theologians and caregivers re-imagine and enact caregiving as more than a palliative service or a curative ministry of care.

When we ground pastoral care in the creative act of God's love, the person as sacred image called to become human and holy in relationship to and for God, others, and the world, what emerges is an understanding of pastoral care as an e-vocation, as the calling forth of others to life. In the process, pastoral care becomes an affirmative way not merely a reactionary practice, a *via positiva*, since no one comes into life whole and entire nor holy and fully human. It is intentionally attending to and caring for the

⁹⁰These modes of being are: Preciousness, uniqueness, opportunity, nonfinality, process and events, solitude and solidarity, reciprocity, and sanctity. Refer to Chapter 3 of this work for explication of these modes of being.

developmental, unfolding nature of human being by supporting the essential modes of human living that is meant by formational.⁹¹

Until quite recently, the history of pastoral care in North America in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially because it was so heavily influenced by Western medicine, psychology, and the psychotherapeutic paradigm, has conceived of care almost exclusively in terms of pathology and pain relief. Care comes about primarily because of need. A good example of this is seen in William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle's well-known definition of pastoral care which was widely accepted and virtually unchallenged from the mid-1960's until the early 1980's.⁹² They write:

The ministry of the cure of souls, or pastoral care, consists of helping acts, done by *representative Christian persons*, directed toward the *healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons* whose troubles arise *in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns*.⁹³

There are many grounds on which this definition can and must be challenged today.

However, it is not my intention to evaluate this statement point by point, but rather to suggest that it represents one particular long-standing and still present bias regarding the nature and focus of pastoral care, namely, that "the ministry of pastoral care is directed to troubled persons and is aimed at supporting and helping them as individual persons."⁹⁴

Taking a long view of history, the positive aspect of this definition is that it suggests

⁹¹I prefer the word "formational" to describe this dimension of care rather than "preventative" or "proactive." Formation, within the context of caregiving, need not imply condescension, control, or authoritarianism. Involved in soul care, caregivers accompany others who, with varying degrees of consciousness and intentionality, are seeking and hoping to give meaningful form to their lives.

⁹²One of the earliest criticisms of and challenges to this definition can be found in Stephen Pattison, *A Critique of Pastoral Care* (London: SCM Press, 1988). In addition, given that the central figure of this work is Jewish, it is incumbent that I at least state that *cura animarum* (understood here as the history and practice of pastoral care) is not the private possession, privilege, or responsibility of Christians.

⁹³Clebsch and Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical*, 4.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 5. Stephen Pattison was one of the first to criticize the problem-centered nature of this definition. Pattison, *Critique of Pastoral Care*, 12.

people of faith have been for centuries caring for those who suffer. But what it also reveals is that pastoral care has been understood almost exclusively as a *reactive* rather than as a *creative* (that is, an *evocative* or *formational*) ministry and way of being. Because it was presumed that “soul care always deals with troubled persons,” pastoral care has been framed and carried out primarily in terms of diagnosis, treatment, and cure.⁹⁵ This understanding tacitly means care does not come into play until and unless someone is broken or until after something has gone terribly wrong. Then, at this point, caregiving begins.

In reality, when we trace the spiritual roots of care back to the original creative act of love, we realize that creation was set in motion by care and was itself an act of care. Care is creative, not only reactive. It is formative, not merely reformatory. It activates as well as responds. It evokes that which is true, honorable, pure, lovely, and gracious in persons and communities and continues to help them in giving ongoing form to their lives.⁹⁶ Care both initiates relationship and expresses what a relationship of love calls forth from people. Just as a mother and father’s care for their newborn baby begins immediately upon the birth of the child (even prior to, as parents read books, take classes, find a pediatrician, paint and prepare the baby’s room, buy a new crib, clothes, bottles, and stuffed animals, etc.) so too the honor, task, and responsibility of caregiving begins with the genesis of new life not with the presence of new problems.

While challenging or complementing the limitations and exclusivity of the pathologically-focused, palliative and curative orientation of care, an evocative-formational approach is also more than preventative care. In her book, Listening for the

⁹⁵Clebsch and Jaekle, Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective, 5.

⁹⁶Philippians 4:8.

Soul: Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction, pastoral theologian and practitioner Jean

Stairs writes:

... [P]astoral care has the potential to be both preventative and restorative in nature. It is *preventative* because it lessens the likelihood of burnout for pastoral care practitioners, and it can significantly modify the range and type of requests received for pastoral services.⁹⁷

I believe this is true. But to describe soul care as defensive or preventative is only a slight improvement over the pathologically-oriented, problem-centered, psychotherapeutic model of pastoral care. This is more than semantics. Whereas, for example, preventative medicine implies health care that wards off the causes of stress, physical ailments, or disease, the most important benefit is not what it prevents but what it presents, not what it wards off but what it intends and makes possible: quality and fullness of life. To talk about the care of souls as preventative is like thinking of silence only as the absence of noise or about peace only as the absence of war. This ascribes only a negative meaning and thus is incomplete. Just as silence and peace contain positive dimensions, meaning, and purpose, so too does the cure of souls. Thus, in order to emphasize that *cura animarum* is a creative endeavor, a *via positiva*, a way that calls forth and makes possible the fullness of life, I prefer to speak of the *evocative* and *formational* dimensions of care.

The Evocative and Formational Task of Care

The word *evocative* comes from the Latin word meaning *to call forth*. The word *formational* suggests *the act or process of giving form or shape* to a particular reality. The former implies that care entails the summoning of that which is unknown, nascent, hidden, and not fully emerged. The latter insinuates that care involves accompanying

⁹⁷Stairs, Listening for the Soul, 38.

others in the ongoing and intentional determination to create, shape, and give meaningful form to their lives. In an interview given shortly before his death, Rabbi Heschel was asked if he had any words he wanted to direct to young people. He concluded his remarks by saying:

... above all, remember that the meaning of life is to build a life as if it were a work of art. You're not a machine. And you are young. Start working on this great work of art called your own existence.⁹⁸

A pastoral care that is mystical or contemplative in nature and scope, one that is inspired by Heschel's work in which humanity's sacred image is both an actuality and a potentiality, in which one's full humanity is "yet-to-be-determined," in which life is imagined as a work of art and that work is understood as a work-in-progress, is necessarily evocative and formational. In pastoral care that is patently spiritual care, it is first and foremost the Spirit who calls forth and forms. Caregivers are called to assist the Spirit in the formation of singular, unique, and precious individuals and communities. Again, regular contemplation and the intentional cultivation of contemplative living especially enable and form caregivers who can listen to and help others to cooperate with the movement of the Spirit in the concrete and unfolding circumstances of their lives.⁹⁹

Building on Heschel's image we can say that the evocative task of caregivers is directly and subtly to recognize and receive people as sacred images of the divine, to evoke this truth from people by lovingly attentive, nonjudgmental, compassion presence, and to encourage others to view and live their lives as great works of art in progress, the

⁹⁸Carl Stern, "Carl Stern's Interview with Dr. Heschel," in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 412.

⁹⁹ See Stairs, Listening for the Soul. Stairs uses "listening for the soul" as the primary image required for soulful pastoral care.

work of their unfolding being co-created with God.¹⁰⁰ In evocative care the caregiver invites that underlying truth and latent potential which is concealed, unknown, untapped, or suppressed to come forth, even when the one giving birth cannot see or trust in what the caregiver sees and knows to be true. It may be that the caregiver's work begins with helping persons to learn to trust that their lives are not already fixed and closed but open-ended and being-written. It may be that the work begins with helping another believe in their sacred worth. A personal anecdote recounted by John D. Eusden, professor and author, about some counsel he received while being on a retreat illustrates the point. He writes:

My problem was not that I thought too highly of myself but that I did not think highly enough of myself. The next day, my director told me to imagine a host of angels going before me proclaiming, "Make way for the Image of God."¹⁰¹

Margaret Guenther points out in her book on spiritual direction that "a midwife sees clearly what the birthgiver cannot see" and thus offers reassurance and encouragement.¹⁰² Whether in long or short-term therapy, pastoral counseling or spiritual direction, an essential role and sacramental task of the caregiver is to reflect back to the other, to envisage for the other, what that person finds difficult or impossible to see and believe, namely, their innate preciousness, worth, and sacredness.

It is because so much human breakage and suffering can be traced to a wound or series of diminishments whereby one's sense of being a sacred image was lost or

¹⁰⁰See Merton's description of this process in New Seeds of Contemplation, 32, 33.

¹⁰¹John Westerhoff, III and John D. Eusden, The Spiritual Life: Learning East and West (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 58.

¹⁰²Margaret Guenther, Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1992), 87.

damaged in early childhood or adolescence that evocative-formational care as a *via positiva* aimed at recovering and celebrating this truth must begin in the life of a person as early as possible and should inform and guide the congregational pastoral care of all communities of faith. In one Catholic church I know, when an infant is baptized, the priest invites the oldest member in the assembly that Sunday to come forward, sign the forehead of the child with the sign of the cross, and bless the newest member of that community. This is not meant to be merely a sweet token gesture. It is an evocative and formative act of pastoral care, a brief but profound ritual moment in the ongoing and collective memory of that community of faith. Similarly, in a home for neglected or abused children where I once worked in Philadelphia, Mr. Wilson, a grandfatherly houseparent, who was the overnight staff person, would line up the children before they went to bed each evening and perform a simple but sacred ceremony.

It was remarkable how the children, normally rambunctious and unruly, quickly settled down, anxious and ready to receive the nightly unction they had been deprived of thus far in their lives. One by one, Mr. Wilson called the children forward by name. Sitting in a straight back chair and with the child standing close and face to face with him, Mr. Wilson poured baby oil into his hand. Then he tenderly, amply, lovingly rubbed it into each child's head of hair, smearing the leftover oil affectionately on the child's forehead and face. Oh, how even the angriest, bitter, foul-mouthed, damaged waif did glisten and shine!

This modest ritual said more and taught more about the sacraments, about who God is, and about who those children really were than any religious education class or catechism ever could. It said something to those bruised and broken children about the nature of God's love: that it is generous beyond measure, prodigal, personal, unearned, pure gift. It said something to each child regardless of race, creed or color, despite the day's misdemeanors and demerits, about their own dignity and sacred worth. And wherever they might be today, whether in heaven or on earth, if anything saved those children, salvaged their fragile lives, it was not the daily dose of meds, counseling sessions, art therapy or group

activities. It was the intimate elegance and indulgent superfluosness of this nightly anointing with baby oil.¹⁰³

These are simple but profound examples of evocative and formative care not just ritual events. Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors, as well as pastoral staffs of local congregations, hospitals, prisons, hospices, or homes for the elderly should recover and create ancient and new ways respectively that directly and indirectly call forth from and convey to those for whom they care the realization that they are the beloved of God.¹⁰⁴ Evocative care is based on the recognition that every person is innately and infallibly precious, that each person, in Heschel's words, is "a synonym for an incarnation of uniqueness," and that "every human being has something to say, think, or do which is unprecedented."¹⁰⁵ This theological conviction is at the heart of mystical-prophetic pastoral care and should be intentionally and creatively integrated into all acts of care: preaching, teaching, worshipping, welcoming, caring, guiding, pastoral visiting, advocating, resisting, and attending to the needs of the most vulnerable.

The formational dimension of care means more than that care is educational or instructional. It is neither reduced to nor the exclusive charge of religious education. In the life of a child, instruction is only one way that parents, guardians, loved ones, and a nurturing community encourage growth and development. Within the broader context of

¹⁰³Daniel J. Miller, "An Elegant Sufficiency: Symbol and Gesture in Christian Initiation," *Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation*, 24, no. 6 (November 2003), 2-13.

¹⁰⁴Not all care or acts of care need be direct or overt. Pastoral caregivers should remember the words of Emily Dickinson who wrote: "Tell all the truth but tell it slant---/ Success in Circuit lies/ Too bright for our infirm Delight/ The Truth's superb surprise/ As lightning to the Children eased/ With explanation kind/ The Truth must dazzle gradually/ Or every man be blind---. Emily Dickinson, "Poem 1129," in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1960), 506-07.

¹⁰⁵Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 36-38.

spiritual life and the community of faith, care is formational and formation is care.

Formational care involves caring for the growth and development of the whole person beginning at birth and continuing throughout life in both the predictable and the unique circumstances of a person's existence. It is because "in the actual human situation 'to be' is inseparable from 'how to be' that formation is critical."¹⁰⁶ To speak of the formational nature of care means that life "is not a solid structure or string of predictable facts, but an incalculable series of moments and acts."¹⁰⁷ It means that the human person is "a complex of opportunities," and that human beings have the power to create events, to make of their life a drama and not to tolerate or suffer it as a random process. It means, as stated above, that human persons are created unfinished, that "being human means being on the way, striving, waiting, hoping," and that of necessity, humans need guidance.¹⁰⁸ More importantly, from a theological, mystical, and pastoral care perspective, it means that humans are loved into being more than they are taught into being. This signals the premise, method, and purpose of evocative-formational care.

The image of the mid-wife favored among many spiritual directors is one image of evocative care. It portrays the intimacy of the evocative caregiver's privilege, function, and goal: to be mid-wives of the soul, to help others give birth to the unfolding meaning, manner, and mystery of their own lives. Like mid-wivery, evocative care begins with compassionate presence. Guenther states:

¹⁰⁶Heschel, Who Is Man?, 47.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 41, 39.

It is important to remember . . . that the midwife is not necessarily a wife, or even a woman. The literal meaning of the word is “with-woman,” that is, the person who is with the birthgiver. . . .

Like the midwife, spiritual directors [and pastoral caregivers] are with-women and with-men.¹⁰⁹

Guenther emphasizes that the mid-wife does things *with*, not *to*, the person giving birth.¹¹⁰

Sensitive caregivers like sensitive mid-wives assist at a natural event. It is in the specific way that caregivers are with the other that establishes the safety, trust, and respect that are so essential for human becoming. Mid-wives invite questions and teach by helping the birthgiver toward greater self-knowledge. They know when to comfort and how to confront. They honor the uniqueness of each birthgiver, yet use their experience to recognize what the birthgiver cannot see, that the transition period, for example, a time of desolation and seemingly unmanageable pain and nausea, is a sign of breakthrough and great progress. Mid-wives know when the birthgiver should hold back, when she should push, when and how she should breathe deeply, when to acknowledge the pain and when to fight through it, and when and how to give heart and to assist the birthgiver in doing the seemingly impossible. Finally, mid-wives receive the newborn baby, offer it back to the mother as the fruit of her labor, and rejoice and celebrate with the birthgiver in the new life that has come forth.¹¹¹

The Ongoing Nature of Evocative-Formational Care

A central assertion of this work is that pastoral ministry as expressed in evocative and formational care must begin as early as possible in the life of persons and

¹⁰⁹Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 86.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 87.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 87-88.

communities. If evocative care concerns calling forth in others the realization and celebration of the mystery and spiritual dignity of one's life, then it cannot begin too soon nor be offered too late in life. Nor can formational care which is the ongoing accompaniment and support that aims at helping others to live by a goal that is larger than oneself. While I am urging a view and practice of care that is a *via positiva* and not merely preventative or problem-centered, that it involves care not only for the deeply scarred forty-five year old but also for the relatively unscathed five-year old, I am stressing as well that the opportunity and need for caregivers to evoke and support others in the formation of their lives is ongoing. It would be incorrect to believe that evocative-formational care only occurs or is required prior to the first serious crisis in the life of a person or community.¹¹² It always will be necessary, imperative, and valuable. As mentioned above, the purpose of care is to support the person in becoming a person, that is, in transcending the self and becoming holy and human. Therefore, evocative-formational care is needed "from womb to tomb," and does not require suffering or trauma to initiate or justify it. Given the unfinished nature of the human person, it is an ongoing need. Evocative care morphs into formative care which becomes evocative care in an ongoing spiral because to become human means to be born again and again and again. It is precisely because children grow up to be men and women who are successful professors and authors yet still doubt, disbelieve, or forget their inherent sacred dignity

¹¹²We need to remember that the terms evocative, formational, sympathetic, and transformational are for the sake of describing different aspects of care and are not to imply a paint-by-number compartmentalized view of the act of care. In reality, especially in individual care, care is fluid. The giver, recipient, or observer of care cannot easily identify where one type of care ends and the others begin. More will be said later regarding sympathetic and transformational care.

that the evocative-formational approach to care is indispensable and must continue throughout life.

In his essay on aging well, "To Grow in Wisdom," addressing aging, Rabbi Heschel indicates why evocative-formational care is a life-long endeavor. Although he points out that the later years especially should be viewed as "the age of opportunities for inner growth," he warns that age is no guarantee of wisdom.¹¹³ In other words, from their youth people must be intentional about the trajectory of their lives. Yet, even if an elderly person has lived a frivolous, unexamined, or self-absorbed life, it is not too late for formation. Because of this, Heschel bemoans the fact that care for the elderly tends to mirror the cultural trend of retirees who devote a disproportionate amount of time to hobbies, entertainment, and recreation that ultimately do not re-create. Thus, as people become less able to engage in physical activities, they become bored, depressed, and feel insignificant. He quips:

At every home for the aged there is a director of recreation in charge of physical activities; there ought to be also a director of learning in charge of intellectual activities. . . .

What the nation needs is senior universities for the advanced in years where wise men should teach the potentially wise, where the purpose of learning is not a career, but where the purpose of learning is learning itself.¹¹⁴

With particular meaning for caregivers, he continues:

The goal is not to keep the old man busy, but to remind him that every moment is an opportunity for greatness. Inner purification is at least as important as hobbies and recreation. The elimination of resentments, of residues of bitterness, of jealousies and wrangling is certainly a goal for which one must strive.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Heschel, "To Grow in Wisdom," in Insecurity of Freedom, 78.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 78-79.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.* 79.

Formational care is an expression of loving companionship and makes use of any and all means of grace to call forth and promote transcendent living.¹¹⁶ Individual or congregational care that is evocative and formational will attend to the spiritual needs of the elderly by offering multiple ways for them to move gracefully toward the consummation of their life. Caregivers can create opportunities for meaningful ritual, meaningful remembrance, meaningful confession and reconciliation, meaningful storytelling, meaningful sharing of wisdom (for example, to the younger generations), and meaningful celebration. There is no formal curriculum, nor any sectarian constrictions for evocative-formational care. Anything that intentionally awakens persons or communities to greater awareness and aliveness, greater appreciation and gratitude, greater sensitivity and compassion, greater passion and joy, greater selflessness and God consciousness can be an act of evocative and formational care that contributes to the ongoing growth of persons or communities.

A mystical-prophetic pastoral care is the ministry of accompanying persons and communities in and through all the seasons and circumstances of life: in birth and death, in growth and stagnation, in the mundane and the mysterious, in exaltation and humiliation, in joy and suffering, in faith and fear, in resisting and letting go, in hope and despair, in celebration and compassion, in discovery and recovery, always oriented toward supporting others in moving toward spiritual maturity. Pastoral care understood as spiritual formation is geared toward fostering spiritual maturity, that is, toward greater

¹¹⁶In a later section I will list and describe various ways that formational care can be exercised. Parker Palmer writes about how the use of such things as poetry, story, music, or art can enhance spiritual growth and discovery because it becomes a truth-bearing metaphor that represents neither the voice of the facilitator (counselor, rabbi, pastor, spiritual director) nor the voice of the participant (client, congregant, parishioner, directee). He refers to these mediating embodiments as “third things.” Parker Palmer, A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2004), 92.

human aliveness and genuine holiness. Spiritual maturity is evidenced by the capacity to face reality, the grateful acceptance and celebration of one's sacred dignity, the vitality that comes from both the recognition of one's failures and limitations and the gratefulness for one's successes and potential, the commitment to orient and live one's life beyond self-interest, the cultivated openness to be moved by the awesome and the awful, the capacity and courage to be compassionately concerned about others, and the intentional response of one's life to God who is source, sustainer, and end of human existence. Kenneth Leech maintains that the sign of spiritual maturity and "a test of our spirituality must be whether it makes us more aware of the realities of the world, and therefore more ready to respond to them, or not."¹¹⁷ For Jews, spiritual maturity is brought about by commitment to the three pillars of religious existence: worship, learning, and action. Spiritual maturity is also the aspiration of committed Christians and is realized in and through the process of spiritual formation, that is, in and through the process by which we are formed in and by Christ (Christening or Christification). Evocative-formational care is to the end of insuring that the world is not overrun by spiritual toddlers and adolescents running around in adult bodies. "Failure in nurturing the essential sensibilities," Heschel warns, "results in the decay of the humanity of the individual man" and of humanity as a whole.¹¹⁸ Evocative-formational care hopes to cultivate men, women, and children of integrity and wholeness, persons whose lives are fired by wonder, filled with joy, characterized by compassion, and committed to justice. It calls forth and gives form to these "essential sensibilities" by understanding and

¹¹⁷Leech, Spirituality and Pastoral Care, 35.

¹¹⁸Heschel, Who Is Man?, 31.

performing pastoral care as an act of love and contemplative presence, by creating space for others, and by cultivating a life of contemplative engagement.

Let us now look further at the theology and practice of mystical care, highlighting its central features and suggesting ways that it can be evoked and carried out.

Mystical-Pastoral Care as an Act of Love

Pastoral care is the effulgence of God's love under the form of human presence and personalized compassion in the name of the community of faith. It is the incarnation and prolongation of God's infinite love and passionate care. When asked by grade school children how she could see God in the destitute people that she fed, clothed, and sheltered every day for fifty years in the Bowery section of New York City, Dorothy Day, the twentieth century mystical-prophet and co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, said that it was an act of love constantly repeated. Pastoral care is an act of love constantly repeated. It is an act of love that arises from an act of faith and that is sustained by an act of hope, both of which also are constantly repeated.¹¹⁹ Although the act of helping is a vital and essential way to express love, it is a subtle but important distinction to identify the prime motivation for pastoral care as love rather than help. The problem with viewing care primarily as help is that it leads almost invariably to conceiving of care in light of the medical model and care is reduced to a function. The problem with the medical model is its tendency to reduce the person to a patient. Whereas the danger in primitive medicine was to personalize the disease, the tendency in modern times is to depersonalize the patient. Whether in medical care or pastoral care, when we

¹¹⁹Robert Ellsberg, ed., By Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 329-30.

reduce the person to a patient we often treat the disease but ignore the person.¹²⁰ The primary impetus of mystical (and a prophetic) care is not the belief that we have been helped but that we are loved. The spiritual stimulus for care is the experiential knowledge that we have been created and known and that this original divine action was a free and freeing act of love.

Understanding pastoral care as “helping others” is not altogether wrong, just incomplete and at times misleading. One danger of framing care as help is to misconstrue care as being primarily something the caregiver *does* or *does for* the other, which often leads to disempowering the recipient of care and to the act of care deteriorating into fixing or rescuing. The perspective of Frank Ostaseski, the founder of the Zen Hospice Project, is insightful and applicable here. Internationally recognized for his innovative approaches to end-of-life care that reaffirms the spiritual dimensions of dying, Ostaseski makes the distinction between fixing, helping, and serving, maintaining that the purpose of hospice is to serve. He states, “When you *fix*, you assume something is broken. When you help, you see the person as weak. But when you *serve*, you see the person as intrinsically whole. You create a relationship in which both parties gain.”¹²¹ I believe the various pastoral expressions of care, for example, nurturing, accompanying, creating space, attending, guiding, healing, reconciling, celebrating, resisting, empowering, liberating, or advocating, are best understood as ways of loving, and love that is motivated by, understood as, and carried out from a mystical-prophetic approach, means to serve. These pastoral functions of care, in order to be appropriately understood and

¹²⁰Heschel, “The Patient as a Person,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 29.

¹²¹As found in Stan Goldberg, “Fixing? Helping? Serving?”, 2004, available from http://www.templeton.org/powerofpurpose/winners/contest_details.html (accessed January 6, 2007).

prayerfully performed, must be seen as enactments of love that are compelled by and part of a divine love which knows and recognizes the innate dignity (what Ostaseski means by the intrinsic wholeness) of the human person. In so doing, we reconfigure the true character and vocation of the person or community involved in *cura animarum* around love instead of help.

As a ministry oriented toward cultivating and supporting full human aliveness and holiness, mystical-pastoral care is fundamentally a ministry or service of love. As the fullest way of being human, love is both what is communicated and what is called forth in and formed by care.¹²² For Heschel, the pious man or woman (the *Hasid*) is, above all, a person in love. So too is the pastoral caregiver. What he says of the *Hasid* is true also of the caregiver. He writes:

To be a *Hasid* is to be in love, to be in love with God and with what God has created. Once you are in love you are a different human being. . . . The *Hasidim* are in love with God. Even, strangely enough, in love with the world. The history of Hasidism is a history of being in love with God's story.¹²³

In spiritual and pastoral care, love is the motive force, the constitutive feature, the primary means, and the purpose for serving others.

This is not to say that love (or loving) as the operative image for pastoral care grounded in the original creative act, is any less susceptible to misunderstanding and abuse than other images of care. Whether caregivers view what they do as love or help, in actual practice they are still vulnerable to inappropriateness, mixed motives, hidden

¹²²McNamara, *Earthy Mysticism*, 72.

¹²³Heschel, "Hasidism as a New Approach to Torah," in S. Heschel, ed., *Moral Grandeur*, 34.

agendas, misjudgments, power plays, and mistakes.¹²⁴ The value of this image for care is not that it is more useful but that it is pre-eminent and more fundamental to the action of God, traceable to the original divine desire, decision, and deed. One of the reasons that caregivers, in particular, need to practice contemplation or develop a regular contemplative practice is in order to diminish the chances that they will unconsciously look to their congregants, directees, or counselees for the approval, affection, or love that ultimately can come only from God. Contemplation is the smithy where God alone fires, hammers, and shapes the human heart for receiving and giving love. However, its “God-given” potential to transform life means neither that contemplation is a part of an analgesic spirituality nor a form of angelism. Quite the contrary. Writing from the Anglican tradition, Leech reminds that contemplation like spirituality itself is actually an earthy practice demanding great effort and often involving tremendous struggle.¹²⁵ It is here, perhaps more than anywhere else, that the ego is tangibly disarmed of its incessant need to control and persuade and thus where the person discovers most truly the wordless and agenda-less meaning of love.¹²⁶

¹²⁴It is my conviction, along with many of the authors cited in Chapter Two, that in a *mystical-prophetic* care, contemplation and the contemplative life, are viewed as the privileged place for experiencing the passionate love of God and oneself as beloved, effecting the transformation of consciousness and personality. For Christians, who look to Christ as the supreme model of care, and understand contemplation as transformation into Christ, William McNamara’s words are suggestive for care: “The more I pray, the more I think and love and act like Christ.” To the extent that caregivers are committed contemplatives, it lessens the causes for and chances of unhealthy or inappropriate caregiving. McNamara, *Earthy Mysticism*, 26. See also, Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994, 2003); Gerald G. May, *Awakened Heart*.

¹²⁵Leech, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care*; see Chapter 5 “Spirituality and Struggle,” 31-44.

¹²⁶Thomas Keating, for example, refers to Centering Prayer as “Divine Therapy.” He states: “The level of deep rest accessed during the prayer period loosens up the hardpan around the emotional weeds stored in the unconscious, of which the body seems to be the warehouse. The psyche begins to evacuate spontaneously the undigested emotional material of a lifetime, opening up new space for self-knowledge, freedom of choice, and the discovery of the divine presence within. As a consequence, a growing trust in God, a bonding with the Divine Therapist, enables us to endure the process.” Thomas Keating, *Invitation to*

To identify pastoral care as an act of love rather than help is not to say that the use of tools and techniques borrowed from the behavioral sciences or the psychotherapeutic paradigm are irrelevant or inappropriate for pastoral caregivers. Any craftworker or artisan knows the importance of good tools. However, a pastoral care that is consciously soul care, that is mystical in motivation, conception, and practice rather than medical or psychological means that caregivers must especially rediscover and learn to use spiritual practices and means of grace to cultivate what Tilden Edwards calls “disciplines for the spiritual heart,” and to become intimately familiar with “dimensions of spiritual living.”¹²⁷ Predicaments that are indigenous to the soul must be responded to with means that are likewise native to the soul. Among spiritual practices, Edwards lists embodiment, sound and silence, seeing, communing, and appreciating.¹²⁸ He could just as easily have used terms from Jewish practice like *midrash*, *kavanah*, *teshuva*, and *devekut*, or terms from the Christian mystical tradition like practicing the presence of God, *Lectio Divina*, the Jesus Prayer, and contemplative prayer.¹²⁹

Love (Rockport, MA: Element, 1992), 3. A brief description of Centering Prayer follows in this dissertation.

¹²⁷ It is my contention that caregivers are not so much in need of “tools,” even ones called spiritual, but rather a way of life called mystical or contemplative which is cultivated and nourished by certain intentional practices and behaviors.

¹²⁸ Tilden Edwards, Living the Presence: Disciplines for the Spiritual Heart (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1987). The complete list of spiritual practices and dimensions of spiritual living includes: grounding, embodiment, sound and silence, seeing, communing, re-membering, acting, and appreciating.

¹²⁹ Later I will discuss ways of cultivating a contemplative consciousness and lifestyle. *Midrash* refers to the study and interpretation of scripture. Its principle aim is to listen to and dwell upon the biblical text from an ethical and devotional point of view. *Kavanah* as mentioned earlier, refers to the concentration, devotion, intention, or directed consciousness toward God. *Teshuva* is the practice of repentance, of consciously turning to God. *Devekut*, especially developed by the kabbalists, refers to an attitude of cleaving to God. Many of these Jewish practices were progenitors to the Christian monastic practice of *Lectio Divina*. See, for example, Fine, Physician of the Soul, 222ff.

These and other spiritual arts and skills are particularly important for mystical-pastoral caregivers and are learned especially in the school (from Latin, *schola*, leisure) of the spirit, for example, in silence, solitude, Sabbath, sacred reading or study, spiritual direction, festivity and transformative ritual, as well as in the smithy of self-restraint, negative contingency, disenchantment, poverty, suffering, and the works of mercy, to mention some but not all.¹³⁰ These spiritual practices and environments (habits and habitats) that invite depth and support spiritual maturity are essential for care of souls because in order for caregivers to participate in the creative act of divine love by offering genuine and appropriate love to others, they must first experience themselves as loved.

William Johnston, the Jesuit teacher and specialist in East-West mysticism, asserts that mysticism begins and ends with the experience of *being loved*. For the mystic, he explains, the principle thing is not to love (this is secondary) but *to receive love*, to let yourself be loved by God and others.¹³¹ Speaking of the Sinaitic covenant (which for Heschel is the deepening of the divine-human relationship begun with creation) as “a way of becoming fully alive, a way of becoming fully human,” Johnston offers helpful words for caregivers along this line of thought. He writes:

As is clear, the covenant is concerned with the last of these [transcendental precepts]: *Be in love*. But (and this is important) a close look at the covenant reveals an even more fundamental and challenging transcendental precept:

¹³⁰ Anecdotal evidence that pastoral care has been heavily psychological rather than spiritual in conception and orientation until the last fifteen years or so is seen in how little emphasis and guidance have been given comparatively to spiritual formation and spiritual practices in Christian theological schools charged with preparing men and women for pastoral ministry. I cannot speak to the situation in Jewish theological education and the training of rabbis and educators. This situation has markedly changed in seminaries today, especially since Vatican II which effected a spirit of ecumenism, marked by greater openness and inter-faith dialogue which brought about the sharing of spiritual practices.

¹³¹ William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), 89.

Accept love
or
Be loved
or
Let yourself be loved¹³²

In New Seeds of Contemplation, Thomas Merton offers similar words that are equally incisive for every pastoral caregiver. He writes:

The root of Christian love is not the will to love, but *the faith that one is loved*. The faith that one is loved *by God*. That faith that one is loved by God although unworthy—or, rather, irrespective of one's worth!¹³³

A mystical approach to care is guided by the conviction that ultimately caregivers are only able to love or give care to the extent that they themselves have been awakened to and experienced the unrestricted love of God. From a contemplative perspective, these sacred disciplines and formative and transformative environments are the time-honored, sacred ways and means by which pastoral caregivers can personally come to know and experience the lavish love of God, the generative blessing that is “the word behind the word, the desire behind the creation.”¹³⁴ In the end, pastoral caregivers minister neither out of their woundedness nor out of their giftedness.¹³⁵ They minister out of their experience and *feeling* of belovedness, which is deeper than either the detriment of their

¹³²William Johnston, Christian Mysticism Today (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1984), 74. The context of this passage is Johnston's assertion that conversion can be described as “fidelity to the transcendental precepts which reflect the basic dynamism of the human spirit: *Be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, be in love.*” He takes these precepts from the work of fellow-Jesuit, Bernard Lonergan. Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 20, 302.

¹³³Merton, New Seeds, 75.

¹³⁴Fox, Creation Spirituality, 44.

¹³⁵The image of wounded healer comes from T.S. Eliot via Henri Nouwen. See Henri J. M. Nouwen, The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1979).

inabilities or the strength of their abilities precisely because its source is God who loves extravagantly.¹³⁶

The genuine experience of belovedness awakens caregivers simultaneously to the mystery and wonder of themselves and to the mystery and lavish love of God. It looks nothing like self-absorption or narcissism because of the unequivocal awareness that it is not self-generated. It comes as gift. The Psalmist sings:

For it was you who formed my
inward parts;
you knit me together in my
mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully
and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works
that I know very well.

(Psalm 139:13-14)

The authentic experience of belovedness always wakes people to the wonder of themselves while pointing them back to the referent of that belovedness who is God. It is the Lover who makes the beloved beloved. If caregivers understand what they do primarily as help rather than love but are themselves secretly unconvinced of their belovedness, if they are still living largely out of "a false self," and therefore are undeveloped or self-absorbed or lacking in self-awareness as persons, the quality of their care will be compromised whether they are sitting with a client, a directee, an inmate, a grieving widow, a searching adolescent, or a guilt-ridden minister.¹³⁷ Wayne Teasdale emphasizes:

¹³⁶Note well. I am using the word *feeling* here in the sense that Charles Davis understands the term as the fullest experience of and total response to a given reality not as sentimentality or emotionalism. See Chapter 1 of this work.

¹³⁷By "false self" is meant the self-absorbed life of the immature person. Thomas Merton popularized this term. See Teasdale, *Mystic Heart*, 268.

We don't have to conquer our false self; we only have to observe it. And through observing it, by being aware of it, we transcend its grip on us and move toward our own transformation into love and compassion.¹³⁸

Humanity is an unfinished product. So too are caregivers. Moving from the false self toward authentic self-love is an ongoing invitation, responsibility, and challenge. But the gravity and grace, the promise and purpose of their ministry demands that they cultivate ways to grow in self-knowledge and self-love. Contemplation and spiritual direction, in particular, are ways that both can be appropriately grounded in the infinite love and acceptance of God.

The spiritual roots of pastoral care are found in the creative act of divine love and nourished especially in contemplation where caregivers come to know themselves and others as particularly and supremely loved by God. To make help penultimate to love is a reminder for pastoral caregivers that care does not begin with them and that spiritual and pastoral help must always be at the service of love and allude to the source of that love. The aim of pastoral ministry, in word and in deed, through presence and practice, is to invite others to see that they are infinitely loved by God and created for love. Thus, love is the impetus, means, *and* content of mystical care (whether articulated directly in words or embodied but unspoken). To identify care as the primal act and that action as a free act of divine love, gives care the place of priority in relation to the broad spectrum of pastoral operations and ministries. In the context of the Jewish or Christian communities of faith this means that the normative pastoral functions, for example, leading, organizing, preaching, teaching, worshipping, attending, promoting peace, working for justice, and serving are all ministries that support, respond to, or express the one primal

¹³⁸Ibid., 108.

act of loving care which is the first and most important vocation of caregivers and the community of faith.

As those whose vocation it is to embody and extend the free act of God's love to others without distinction, caregivers are reminded of their own need to accept the love that is both an announcement about God as Extravagant Lover and an affirmation of themselves as the recipients (objects) of that love. When pastoral caregivers connect the questions, "Why do we care? Why do we offer loving concern to others, regardless of whether they are family, friend, parishioner, stranger, or someone in need?" to the pathos of a loving creator, they begin to see why love and not help is the ultimate motivation for pastoral care. Even though being a helper may appear to be more sophisticated, professional, and useful in this day and age than being a lover, there is no greater need today than for pastoral ministers who understand and live out their vocation to be radical lovers.¹³⁹ A mystical approach to care grounds care in love since the mystic is not only the man or woman *of* love but *in* love as well. It is an illusion for caregivers to think that it is more difficult to be professional helpers than passionate and responsible lovers or to think that to speak in this way about care is Pollyannaish, unrealistic, or ethereal. It is just the opposite. Caregivers who understand and offer their ministry as spiritual and pastoral in nature, traceable to the motive force of God's initial creative act (pathos), must overcome any sense of bashfulness or need to apologize about their call to be more than

¹³⁹Radical here means both extreme and rooted (from *radix*, root). The love extended by the caregiver is radical in the sense that it is rooted in the original, creative, and creating love of God who is the source, impetus, and inspiration for pastoral care. Although not fanatical, there are times when pastoral caregivers are called to love *in extremis*, magnanimously, prodigally, and nonsensically especially in the calculating eyes of the culture.

good helpers. They must be holy lovers.¹⁴⁰ The vocation of the pastoral caregiver is that of St. Therese of Lisieux who wrote in the concluding pages of her autobiography, “My vocation is to love.”¹⁴¹

Pastoral Care as Contemplative Presence

The Theology of Contemplative Presence

One of the most basic and essential contributions of a mystical orientation to care is the supreme value it places on the idea of presence. It is the theological import and the contemplative interpretation and practice of presence that make it one of the principle characteristics of a mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral care. Understood as the embodiment and transitive expression of love, presence is also what distinguishes mystical care from the medical model which tends to pathologize the person and from the psychotherapeutic paradigm which emphasizes diagnosis and adjustment.¹⁴² In addition, the modern pastoral theology, care, and counseling movement in North America still largely bear the stamp of Reformed theology and psychology. Therefore, it is not altogether surprising that the unique alchemy that occurred as a result of mixing twentieth century Reformed Protestant theology with various modern psychologies and psychotherapeutic practices would be verbal in tone and spirit, given the formers’ emphasis on the Word of God and proclamation (in Greek, *kerygma*) and the latters’

¹⁴⁰See Lorne Ladner, The Lost Art of Compassion: Discovering the Practice of Happiness in the Meeting of Buddhism and Psychology (San Francisco, HarperSan Francisco: 2004).

¹⁴¹John Beevers, trans. The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux: The Story of a Soul (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1957), 155.

¹⁴²See Holifield, History of Pastoral Care, 210-11; and Gerkin, Introduction to Pastoral Care, Chapter 2.

attention to diagnostic interpretation and “talk therapy.” This is not to say that the psychotherapeutic paradigm does not involve attentiveness and listening (which it does) nor that a mystical approach does not value the use of words and interpretation (which it does). It is to say that the starting point, emphases, resultant methodologies, and intentions are noticeably different.

Theologically, the idea of presence is based on the creative action of God who is understood not only as the loving source of all life but also as a personal God who creates in order to initiate relationship. Only a personal God can be present to the human being and the human being can only be present to a God who is personal. Heschel asserts:

*The grand premise of religion is that man is able to surpass himself; that man who is part of this world may enter into a relationship with Him who is greater than the world; that man may lift up his mind and be attached to the absolute.*¹⁴³

For Heschel, God’s presence (that is, glory) is not an aesthetic or physical phenomenon but rather refers to “the goodness of God,” to the actual *livingness* of God that permeates all of life and is directed toward humankind and all creation. According to Heschel, although it cannot be seen or comprehended, God’s presence is something that we can sense and experience, and by which we can sense being known. Heschel identifies the principle ways that lead to the certainty of God’s presence as contemplation and worship, scripture study and learning, and by consecrated action and doing God’s will. For Heschel, the *leap of action* leads to the experience of God’s presence not the other way around. Just as we don’t believe our way into acting but act our way into believing, so too, Heschel maintains, we don’t wait for proof of God’s existence or caring presence in

¹⁴³Heschel, God in Search of Man, 33.

order to act. He emphasizes the ordinary, earthy context in which we encounter and are encountered by God:

The natural and the supernatural are not two different spheres, detached from one another as heaven from earth. God is not beyond but right here; not only close to my thoughts but also to my body. This is why man is taught to be aware of His presence not only by prayer, study and meditation but also in his physical demeanor, by how and what to eat and drink, by keeping the body free from whatever sullies and defiles.¹⁴⁴

For Heschel presence cannot be separated from pathos. The presence that God *is*, the I AM that Moses encounters on Mount Sinai, is not merely something factual. God's presence is not something *there* like a table or a lamppost. The presence of God refers to more than just the *existence of God*. The presence that God *is* is always a personal presence, a *Who*, not a *What*. The divine presence, *Shekinah*, is the communication of God's desire to be in relationship. The *Shekinah* is not merely the absolute glory of God but the Indwelling Presence of God *oriented toward* and *for* the world. For Jews, the indwelling and abiding presence of God that is experienced as accompanying the Israelites in exile is experienced most fully as pathos, as divine involvement, as "compassionate engagement with the conflictual world, source of vitality and consolation in the struggle," to use Elizabeth Johnson's words.¹⁴⁵ The faithful companioning of the *Shekinah* is an evocative and fruitful image for Jewish and Christian caregivers alike.

In Christian theology, the dynamism of the Trinity, inclusive of both the distinctness and the inter-being and mutual presence of the three divine persons, characterized by "the love of their undistracted attention to each other in perfect self-

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 39.

¹⁴⁵Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992) 86.

knowledge,” is the supreme example of divine presence.¹⁴⁶ Jesus is understood as the embodiment of divine presence in human form and therefore as God’s total, undistracted attention toward humankind and creation. For Christians, the mystery of the Incarnation is the mystery of the complete *withness* of God. It refers to the Real Presence aimed at humanity and is captured in the title, Emmanuel (God with us). Jesus is the enfleshment of divine presence and the personalization of divine pathos. For mystically-minded Christians, Jesus is not only the presence of the Presence who is God, but also the full human attunement to the divine. In other words, Jesus is the total divine presence turned toward human beings *and* the total human presence turned toward divine being. This image of the living attunement and loving presence to both God and others is illuminative for the Christian caregiver and suggests that the simple, willing consent to be with the other (whether God or a person) is the highest form of relationship or communion.

In addition to the original and ongoing creative act of divine love, I believe that presence is the starting point and the characteristic feature of the care of souls. Divine presence disclosed as pathos is the impetus and inspiration for pastoral care. Pastoral presence, as the human incarnation of divine love, is the medium of care. Because mystical and prophetic living are responses to divine presence and pathos respectively and because, as we saw above, care calls for and requires relationship, an approach to caring that is identified as mystical-prophetic is geared toward presence as well. Although mystical-prophetic care is a seamless garment, for the sake of description we can say that as an expression of mystical care love is conveyed especially as

¹⁴⁶Laurence Freeman, “Presence, Presence of God,” in Downey, ed., New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, 781.

contemplative presence. As an expression of prophetic care love is manifested most fully as compassionate presence.

In its rudimentary form the word presence connotes being there, immediacy, nearness, total awareness, realness, mystery, full consciousness, engagement, and communion. It is the opposite of being distracted, preoccupied, unfocused, sidetracked, or suffering from what the spiritual writer Sue Monk Kidd has coined “attention deficit disorder of the soul.”¹⁴⁷ Presence refers to “keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality.”¹⁴⁸ It is what French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil meant by “attention.” It is similar to what Buddhists mean by “mindfulness,” what Thomas Kelly, a twentieth-century American Quaker, called “continually renewed immediacy,” and is akin to the words emphasized by Raimundo Panikkar as exegited in Chapter Two: the *hic* (here), the *nunc* (now), the *actus* (act itself), the hidden *centrum* (center), and the inner *pax* (peace). Gerald May describes it as “a conscious willingness to fully enter into life just as it is” while James Finley, transposing a passage of Merton’s, similarly refers to it as the awareness of “the divinity of what just is.”¹⁴⁹ It is closely associated with what Heschel means by the Jewish concept and practice of *kavanah*. As a formal concept, *kavanah* means attentiveness, the direction of the mind toward a particular object or act. In its classical formulation, in the context of its native soil, namely, prayer, Heschel reminds us it means “to direct the heart to the Father in heaven.” This explication of

¹⁴⁷Sue Monk Kidd, “Living Welcoming to All,” *Weavings*, 12, no. 5 (September/October 1997), 9.

¹⁴⁸Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 11.

¹⁴⁹May, *The Awakened Heart*, 24. James Finley, *The Contemplative Heart* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2000), 19. Finley’s phrase is based on his exegesis of the concluding passage in Thomas Merton’s book *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

kavanah brings us closer to the spiritual significance and meaning of presence. Heschel explains:

Kavanah . . . is more than paying attention to the text of the liturgy or to the performance of the mitzvah. Kavanah is attentiveness to God. Its purpose is to direct the heart rather than the tongue or the arms. . . . [I]t is an act of valuation or *appreciation* of . . . the opportunity to act in agreement with God.¹⁵⁰

When presence is understood explicitly as an essential dimension of religious existence we move into the realm of prayer and prayerfulness, contemplation and contemplative living. McNamara states simply: "Mysticism is the presence of God felt."¹⁵¹ Tilden Edwards states:

By *contemplative* I mean attention to our direct, loving, receptive, trusting presence for God. This attention includes the desire to be present through and beyond our images, thoughts, and feelings. This intimate, immediate relationship is not an esoteric one meant for the few. It is our deepest human home and calling; all other homes and callings derive their authenticity from it.¹⁵²

In contemplation we experience presence most completely: the presence of God and the human intention to be present to God. That is, contemplative living means being alive to and living "in agreement with God." The Trappist monk, Thomas Keating, the grandfather of the Centering Prayer movement, stresses that contemplation "is primarily relationship, hence, intentionality. It is not a technique, it is prayer."¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 314, 315.

¹⁵¹McNamara, Earthy Mysticism, 77-78.

¹⁵²Tilden Edwards, Living in the Presence: Disciplines for the Spiritual Heart ((San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 2.

¹⁵³Thomas Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel (New York: Amity House, 1986), 5.

Contemplation or contemplative presence is the loving awareness of God, the invisible, transcendent, and infinitely abundant source of everything. It denotes the human availability to and appreciative awareness of the unmitigated reality of God who, while obscure and mysterious, is nevertheless experienced personally and as being lovingly *for*, *toward*, or *with* oneself, humankind, and creation.

In particular, contemplation is the *loving* awareness of the *love* of God and the human response of *love*. Thus, at its core, contemplative presence is evoked by love, partakes of love, and aims at love. It is the fullest possible realization of love, both in receiving and in giving. To quote McNamara who is reworking Heschel:

That is what contemplation is: God, out of *divine pathos*, takes the initiative and calls man by name and solicits his sym-*pathy*, his co-operation, and his presence. And contemplative man lives life fully by being, above all other things, alive to God.¹⁵⁴

Understood as a way of engaging in life, encountering reality, and being in the world and not exclusively as a descriptive term for a “type” of prayer, this aliveness or exchange of love, called mysticism or contemplation, is earthy not ethereal, ordinary not ecstatic. It is the intentional consecration of the quotidian through simple acts of attention and appreciation. In this way, intentionality begets spontaneity. Including but not limited to times of prayer or quiet, it is “a quality of immediate, open presence that is directly involved with life-as-it-is.”¹⁵⁵ Contemplation is expressed as the reverent awareness and acceptance of and the total response to all reality which is understood and experienced as intimately related to, infused with, and embraced by God’s love.

¹⁵⁴McNamara, Human Adventure, 16.

¹⁵⁵May, Awakened Heart, 23.

This means that caregiving as contemplative presence with or toward another person is rooted, first, in the experience of God's life-giving and life-sustaining presence, and second, in the human response of intentional presence back to God who is Loving Presence. In the first instance, although too deep and mysterious to be grasped in images, concepts, or words, it is the unrestricted love of God experienced as personal, caring presence (pathos) that is the motivation and inspiration for pastoral presence. It is both a theological assertion and a pastoral premise: Presence evokes presence. Human and pastoral presence is derivative of divine presence and pathos. In this sense, mystical care is the natural extension of contemplation. Not a technique, it is instead an intentional offering of the divine presence, aliveness, and love that is experienced in contemplation. In the second instance, the human person's reciprocal and contemplative response to God gives caregivers the necessary clues and cues for how to be present to others: prayerfully, passionately, lovingly, attentively, receptively, reverently, and compassionately.

The Caregiver and the Practice of Contemplative Presence

As an approach to ministry, caregivers seek to appropriate the essential features and movements of the mystical and prophetic modes of being into the action of care.¹⁵⁶ As regards mystically informed care, they do this in three primary ways: first, by cultivating a contemplative consciousness and way of living in their own lives, second, by incorporating this same consciousness and way of being into their caregiving, and third, by directly and indirectly evoking, cultivating, and supporting these same attitudes and

¹⁵⁶In appealing to either the mystical or the prophetic life for the purpose of re-imagining care, I am not making the claim that every aspect of mysticism or prophecy can or need be appropriated in order to validate this project. I am not seeking a literal transposition of each and every aspect of these expressions of religion for caregiving.

ways of living in those persons and faith communities for whom they care. In this endeavor it is also critical that caregivers realize the unique role contemplation and contemplative living serve as the spiritual spring that feeds compassionate and prophetic action both in their lives and in the lives of others. Let us examine the above three points more fully.

First, to associate caregiving with contemplative presence means that before caregivers can be a contemplative presence to others, they must first find ways to cultivate deep presence in themselves. The ministry of mystical-prophetic care becomes more congruent as the caregivers themselves embody the perspective and spirit that evoke and encourage a mystical-prophetic approach to life. Especially in a mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral care, the method is the meaning and the message, and the method cannot be separated from its embodiment by the caregiver. This is true whether that care is sitting with and listening to the grief-stricken, visiting the imprisoned, holding in one's heart the suffering of others, helping a family find temporary shelter, naming injustice in the church, challenging unfair business practices, or resisting consumerism, sexism, racism, or militarism.

It is important for contemplative caregivers to remember, as William McNamara continually points out, that contemplation as a way of seeing and living is caught more than taught. Rabbi Heschel stresses that what is needed more than anything else in spiritual formation are not *textbooks* but *textpeople* since what people most remember are persons and personal encounters.¹⁵⁷ Using the language of my Catholic tradition, the tasks and methods of a mystical-prophetic pastoral care must not only be consistent with but

¹⁵⁷Heschel, "Jewish Education," in Insecurity of Freedom, 237.

also a sacramental sign of the motivation that drives the care and of the purpose toward which the care points. Textpeople participate in the ongoing formation of others not merely by what they say but by how they live and engage with those around them, evoking and provoking. Stairs writes:

To encourage contemplative living and to teach effectively about contemplative prayer, pastoral caregivers must themselves be familiar with the contemplative tradition and committed to the habitual practice of contemplative living and prayer. Such familiarity is essential to provide credibility as pastoral caregivers and to model the lifelong nature of contemplative practices and prayer.¹⁵⁸

A mystical-prophetic approach to care is based on the supposition that contemplation or the contemplative way is the most authentic source for learning how to be truly present: to God, oneself, others, and creation.¹⁵⁹ Teasdale's words are important to mull over for those who hope to offer care from a mystical or contemplative orientation. He writes:

Spiritual practice, the work of transformation, is the means of inner growth and change toward human maturity glimpsed in the best of religious experience. . . . Through this disciplined habit of relating to the divine, the living, transformative power of inner reality takes hold. Without a spiritual practice of some kind, spirituality is a hollow affair; it has no substance and is reduced to the formalism of external religiosity.

Daily spiritual practice is the "technology" of inner change. Without it, such change is inconceivable. Devotions alone are insufficient; the practice must be contemplative. Only such intense forms of inner discipline lead to the interior breakthroughs that provide real progress in the spiritual life. This insight is found in all the spiritual traditions, and marks the difference between a genuine mystical process and popular religion, or a purely devotional type of spirituality. . . . [S]piritual practices change us within and make this inner change consistent with our actions in the world in our daily lives. . . .

¹⁵⁸Stairs, *Listening for the Soul*, 39.

¹⁵⁹Sarah Butler makes the same claim in Sarah A. Butler, *Caring Ministry: A Contemplative Approach to Care* (New York, Continuum: 1999), 9-11.

Spiritual practice shapes our understanding, character, will, personality, attitudes, and actions by enlarging their scope through the light of compassion and love.¹⁶⁰

In the dynamic relationship between the mystical and prophetic, in the life and work of the caregiver, it is especially the deep well of contemplation that impels, inspires, and safeguards care and enables the caregiver to embody the loving and sympathetic presence that characterize mystical-prophetic care. Contemplation is the most refined form of human presence because in contemplation the impurities of the ego, its duplicity and self-serving agendas, are less operative or for a brief time absent altogether. Consequently, it is the most deeply formative source for caregivers as they seek to be present with and to others in pastoral situations.

Because the loving presence we hope to offer and model for others is best nourished in the caregiver's contemplative life, it is paramount that they develop an intentional and regular practice. James Finley describes contemplative practice this way:

A contemplative practice is any act, habitually entered into with your whole heart, as a way of awakening, deepening, and sustaining a contemplative experience of the inherent holiness of the present moment. Your practice might be some form of meditation, such as sitting motionless in silence, attentive and awake to the abyss-like nature of each breath.¹⁶¹

In terms of an actual personal practice, perhaps the most basic way to learn the art of contemplative presence is by sitting still in a “‘Here I am, Lord’ (1 Sam. 3:4) posture of openness to God,” sitting straight, closing one's eyes, breathing in and out slowly, placing one's hands in a comfortable or meaningful position in the lap, and being present,

¹⁶⁰Wayne Teasdale, The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999), 128-29.

¹⁶¹Finley, Contemplative Heart, 46.

open, and awake to what arises—thoughts, sounds, bodily sensations, feelings, even consolations—neither clinging to nor rejecting anything.¹⁶²

Of course contemplative practice extends far beyond the formal practice of prayer. Finley continues:

Your practice might be simple, heartfelt prayer, slowly reading the scriptures, gardening, baking bread, writing or reading poetry, drawing or painting, or perhaps running or taking long slow walks to no place in particular. Your practice may be to be alone, really alone, without any addictive props or diversions. Or your practice may be that of being with that person in whose presence you are called to a deeper place.¹⁶³

Because mysticism or contemplation is also an all-inclusive way of engaging in life and with all reality, contemplative presence can be fostered in any number of ways, some explicitly religious and faith-based, others simple and with no religious content at all. The mystically-minded caregiver hoping to cultivate contemplative presence is called to learn to be present to everything and to everyone, to *each* thing and to *each* one in its own unique, precious particularity. Using the image of gardening, the poet David Ignatow describes the importance of this capacity to be present to the particular and the immediate in his poem, “Each Stone.”

Each stone its shape
each shape its weight
each weight its value
in my garden as I dig them up
for Spring planting,
and I say, lifting one at a time,
There is joy here
in being able to handle

¹⁶²Finley, Christian Meditation, 24-28. Find here a thorough explanation of the theology and practice of Christian meditation. The simple instructions presented above are a generic composite of contemplative prayer. As Finley points out, although “there is no such thing as a Christian meditation, formally and officially designated as such, if by that we means some specific way to meditate,” when one studies the writings of Christian mystics regarding contemplative prayer, they are strikingly similar. 23.

¹⁶³Finley, Contemplative Heart, 46.

so many meaningful
differences.¹⁶⁴

To understand contemplation as “a long, loving look at the real,” to use McNamara’s definition, is to suggest that before experiencing things as allusions to the divine, we must first simply experience and appreciate them as they are. To the poet and the gardener, the mystic as well as the contemplative caregiver, nothing is incidental. In addition to and as an extension of contemplative prayer, it is in this practice of directly beholding, appreciating, and being moved by “so many meaningful differences” that persons learn to be present to another singularly unique person. Understood in this way, the prayerful, attentive study of Torah, or for Catholic caregivers, the prayerful presence before the Blessed Sacrament are more than study or adoration respectively. They are occasions when persons experientially learn the meaning of being present. What this means is more than just attention before an object the way an assembly-line worker watches intently for blemishes on products passing by. To be present to God who is Real Presence is not merely a matter of mental concentration but of openness and receptivity. Finley maintains, “The critical factor is not so much what the practice is in its externals as the extent to which the practice incarnates an utterly sincere stance of awakening and surrendering to the Godly nature of the present moment.”¹⁶⁵

By allowing ourselves to be susceptible to and acted upon by that which we behold—whether the Torah, the Blessed Sacrament, a daffodil, the photo of a hooded and humiliated prisoner, light playing on the water of a pond, a child at play, or the agony on

¹⁶⁴David Ignatow, Against the Evidence: Selected Poems, 1934-1994 (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 123.

¹⁶⁵Finley, Contemplative Heart, 46.

the face of a young mother who has just been told her baby is still born—we participate in the presence of that which we behold, engage in the history, mystery, and inner life of that person or thing. *Midrash Haggadah*, centering prayer, lectio divina, *mitzvot*, praying before an icon, meditative walking, yoga, Tai Chi, sitting in a rocking chair on a front porch, peeling potatoes, peeling and eating an orange slowly, or gardening in your backyard, are all legitimate and possible opportunities to cultivate contemplative presence and have the capacity to aid caregivers in their ministry of presence to others.

Second, as alluded to above, to conceive of pastoral care *as* contemplative presence implies a particular way of being with another in the act of care. To the extent that the word “method” denotes a technical set of tools that are to be regularly and systematically applied to accomplish a desired result, a mystical approach to care is a “methodless-method” of care, in the same sense that contemplation is beyond method or that Lectio Divina, the ancient contemplative way of praying with scripture, is a methodless method of prayer.¹⁶⁶ McNamara writes:

[T]he nub of the art of contemplation is artlessness or naiveté. There is no method or formal technique for realizing union with God. To realize union is a very simple and childlike affair. We complicate the whole business by our egotistic compulsions to achieve, to attain, and to accomplish.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 9. Hall writes: “Lectio has sometimes been called a “methodless method” of prayer. The description alludes to the fact that it is less a learned way of prayer than one which spontaneously “flows” toward contemplation as its destination, as invariably as the snows of mountain peaks, melted by the spring sun’s warmth, descend through lakes and rivers and ultimately reach the sea. In a similar way, the progressive levels in Lectio are experienced as a unified interior movement which reaches the object of its desire fully only in the final “contemplation.” In no way does this imply that caregivers do not need to develop or utilize basic skill, only that the most fundamental and essential pastoral and spiritual “technique” (that is, “art” or “skill” from the Greek, *tekhnē*) from a mystical perspective is the art of a fully awakened heart or the skill of “simple” contemplative presence which informs and guides apparent inaction or deliberate action. In a sense, mystical-prophetic caregivers are called to be, in the famous words of Ignatius of Loyola, “contemplatives in action.”

¹⁶⁷McNamara, *Earthy Mysticism*, 93.

Thus by extrapolating from Thomas Keating's statement that contemplation is not a technique, "it is prayer" we can suggest that when it comes to the practice of care, contemplative presence is more akin to prayer than to a therapeutic skill. For the purpose of ministry, contemplative presence is not a mechanistic technique as much as it is a conscious and fluid manner of being that is offered to another under the circumstance of care. Contemplative care is the deliberate and coherent extension of the contemplative prayer or contemplative living that is the regular spiritual practice of the caregiver. It is the entire experience of contemplation—simple, intimate, ineffable, transformative—that is brought to bear in mystically oriented care and indirectly made available to the other in the act of care. It is the art of mysticism or contemplation that is cultivated by and in the caregiver and then turned toward and offered for the good of others that is the fundamental way or art of mystical care. Bernard of Clairvaux, the last of the great Church Fathers and a foundation stone in Thomas Merton's thinking about the relationship between contemplation and action, stressed that the "effect of contemplation is to generate a love that makes such a one a good and worthy pastor of souls."¹⁶⁸ The regular practice of contemplative prayer fires the desire in caregivers to care for others and shapes that care. In his book, Christian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God, James Finley explains:

Learning to abide in this meditative awareness of oneness with God, you will be impelled to pass on to others the divine generosity of God that has been and continues to be graciously passed on to you. . . . [T]he more firmly established the habit of daily meditation becomes, the more likely it

¹⁶⁸ As quoted in Daniel J. Adams, Thomas Merton's Shared Contemplation: A Protestant Perspective (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 114.

is that meditative awareness will become your habitual awareness in your day-by-day life.¹⁶⁹

“Practicing the presence of God,” that is, being present to God who *is* Presence, which is another way of describing contemplation, is the unparalleled training ground for nonjudgmental, reverent, compassionate, and loving care.

To argue that the main spiritual “technology” employed in a mystical *approach* to care is the “art” of the inner way itself does not mean to suggest that it is casual or accidental. Like contemplative prayer, it is anything but haphazard.¹⁷⁰ To maintain that contemplative or mystical care is not merely a matter of mechanics means that the calling of care requires not only the application of knowledge and the exercise of skill but also “the facing of a human situation.”¹⁷¹ Like contemplation, which is its consummate source, sustenance, and guide, mystical care is about love. St. Anthony of the desert said, “He prays best who doesn’t even know he is praying.”¹⁷² Similarly, when we are the most loving we are the least self-conscious. Like graceful dancers who have repeated the moves over and over again, seasoned contemplatives or contemplative caregivers do not focus on either “the steps” of prayer or loving care. The “technique” gives way and they become the dance. The caregiver becomes compassionate care itself. Practitioners of a mystical-prophetic care seek naturally to embody, express, and mediate the very

¹⁶⁹Finley, *Christian Meditation*, 34. In this book, Finley defines and describes the varied uses throughout history of the terms meditation, contemplation, contemplative prayer, and mysticism in different religious traditions. For our purposes here it is only important to know that by “meditative awareness” is meant the experiential realization of oneness with the divine as discovered in some form of contemplative prayer.

¹⁷⁰In contemplative care, the technique or way of caring is a natural extension of contemplative being, thus artistic or mystical not mechanistic or operational like a separate tool apart from the caregiver.

¹⁷¹Heschel, “The Patient as a Person,” in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 28.

¹⁷²As quoted in McNamara, *Earthy Mysticism*, 18-19.

perceptions, attitudes, spirit, and way of engaging in life that they hope to evoke, cultivate, nurture, and support by their care.

Motivated by the gracious, loving presence of God, caregivers try to be open, susceptible to, and conscious of that divine love as they offer their own simple presence to another as an expression of that same divine love. Offering the awareness and fruits of one's prayer to the other encountered in care means the "offering" is a showing not a telling. The distinguished Quaker, Douglas Steere, describes this contemplative presence when enacted in human relationships as "a readiness to respect and to stand in wonder and openness before the mysterious life and influence of the other."¹⁷³ Heschel says the world presents itself to us in two ways: as a thing to be owned or as a mystery to be faced. To face the world or another human being in mystery is to face them in awe.¹⁷⁴ Rooted in the conviction that every person is a sacred image called to significant being, this presence is reverent, attentive, and receptive. If we transpose to human persons the meaning of Benedict of Nursia's advice to his monks to handle the farm tools with the same reverence extended to the holy vessels of the altar, we begin to imagine how mystical caregivers are to behold and honor those persons for whom they care. Contemplative presence is characterized by simplicity and nonjudgmental compassion. It is attentive and hopeful, devoid of anticipatory desire or self-serving agendas.

Third, to refer to pastoral care as contemplative presence implies that caregiving, broadly understood, is care for the contemplative way of life itself. Here, caregiving is expressed by caregivers directly inviting people and communities of faith to engage in

¹⁷³Douglas V. Steere, Together in Solitude (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 161.

¹⁷⁴Heschel, Who Is Man?, 88.

regular contemplative practice or indirectly by calling forth from people and communities the secret yearning for the peace, authenticity, vitality, love, and joy that are the fruit of a genuinely contemplative way of living.¹⁷⁵ As mystical care, local faith communities can offer and counselors and spiritual directors can recommend daily or weekly contemplative prayer, meditative walks, opportunities for group lectio or chant, more intentional and appropriately placed silence in corporate worship to pray and to meditate on the texts, gatherings for body movement, and classes in art as contemplation. In her book, Listening for the Soul: Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction, pastoral theologian Jean Stairs encourages an understanding of pastoral care that emphasizes the importance and benefits of cultivating contemplation and contemplative living for individual persons and communities of faith. Quoting at length, she writes:

Encouraging contemplative living and teaching contemplative prayer within congregations are acts of pastoral care. . . . By promoting a contemplative lifestyle, we may find that laypersons not only develop the means for their own daily self-care and spiritual growth, but also the resources and vision for offering pastoral care to others. As individuals adopt a contemplative lifestyle, they find themselves empowered to act in new and bold ways. If people are given tools for loving God more dearly and seeing life more clearly, then they will be mobilized for daily acts of pastoral care toward self and others.

Encouraging . . . contemplative living contributes to spiritual wholeness by restoring balance, perspective, and mental, physical, and spiritual health. Contemplative living and praying embody a concern for the whole person and for the development of souls that experience a stronger integration of the sacred and secular, body and soul, heart and mind, and the inner and outer worlds. . . . Fostering a contemplative lifestyle and teaching forms of contemplative prayer can enable laity to experience less fragmentation and more connectedness between their internal and external worlds, their relationship with God, and their daily actions. . . .

Living contemplatively has obvious personal benefits. Contemplative practice can enliven personal prayer and contribute to the

¹⁷⁵ Again, as many of the figures whose works were reviewed in Chapter 2 emphasize, a contemplative way of living should not imply quietness, passivity, or withdrawal but rather qualities like receptivity, aliveness, appreciation, responsiveness, engagement, and passionate love.

health of an individual's body, mind, and soul. But just as important is the health of the corporate body, mind, and soul. If a significant proportion of a church's membership is practicing a contemplative lifestyle, then it is highly likely that the culture, vision, mission, and faith environment of the congregation itself will undergo significant change.¹⁷⁶

Thus, we are not talking simply about teaching someone to pray. For in being present to the infinite love and presence of God, "inviting and opening ourselves to a graced realization of oneness with God and the mystical fulfillment received in this active seeking," the deepest technique or craft caregivers "learn" and pass on to others is the art of love itself which only God can give.¹⁷⁷ It is the hidden and accumulated wisdom of their contemplation and mystical living that contemplative caregivers unpretentiously and obliquely offer to other persons and communities in their caregiving.

To the end of cultivating and developing contemplative caregivers, seminaries, graduate theology schools, pastoral counseling and spiritual direction training programs charged with preparing lay and ordained ministers for pastoral ministry and the care of souls, must be more creative and committed not only to introducing students and future pastoral ministers to ways of cultivating contemplative presence in their lives but also to integrating these spiritual practices into actual courses. Just as role plays, peer groups, case studies, active listening exercises, and verbatims are a regular part of pastoral care and counseling and spiritual direction classes, it would be beneficial to include spiritual practices that foster contemplative presence as an integral part of courses in pastoral care or spiritual guidance and not only as separate practicums offered by the seminary or theology school.

¹⁷⁶Stairs, Listening for the Soul, 38-39.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 19.

Although in pastoral training, the development of skills and the learning of techniques are essential they are still secondary to the formation of the caregiver as authentic human being and mature person of faith. The ongoing task for the mystical caregiver is to learn to integrate the basic counseling skills and techniques that are instrumental in effective counseling and care into an approach to care that is grounded in a contemplative vision of life.

Therefore, pastoral caregivers first must learn to sit still, to be present themselves, and second, in so doing, learn to develop the more essential ability to be prayerfully present to another human person. For the most part, pastoral classes or training programs have taken for granted this seemingly elementary ability to be present to another human person, instead jumping immediately to theoretical frameworks and therapeutic techniques and skills. The mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral care is based on the conviction that counseling skills and techniques are easier to acquire and develop than contemplative presence is to learn and embody since the former is primarily a matter of *doing* while the latter is primarily a matter of *being*. This is one of the reasons why contemplative prayer is difficult for so many involved in pastoral ministry or the helping professions, especially those with “Type A” personalities or those whose identities are exaggeratedly tied to a high and unchecked need to help: because in contemplation there is nothing for the pray-er to *do*. Contemplative presence is not a skill but one essential expression of a particular *way of being*. The point is not that there is no doing in care. Obviously care must be expressed by *caring*, even if the form of caring appears as seemingly undemanding as sitting with someone. The point is that *doing* ushers forth from *being* which is uniquely discovered and cultivated in contemplative practice, the

fruit of which is a healthy and mature self-awareness, the reverent awareness of others, the appreciative consciousness of what is, and radical openness to God.

The paradox of contemplative presence is that though it is fundamentally a *gift* and not merely an acquired skill, a *way of being* rooted in *being* itself, it nevertheless not only can be but must be learned and practiced by caregivers. There are numerous concentrative and receptive methods for practicing presence. We will consider receptive methods later. I have mentioned some concentrative methods immediately above.¹⁷⁸ Whether walking the labyrinth, trying to pray the Lord's Prayer all the way through concentrating attentively to each word as did Simone Weil, bird watching, writing haiku, studying sacred texts, or sitting at the potter's wheel, any opportunity to focus our attention and be present can be a way to develop contemplative presence that will translate into contemplative caregiving. Below are three exercises or practices that can be used by caregivers and others to begin to develop a taste for simple presence. They are simple but representative concentrative practices.

Explanation of the Exercises

Breathing is fundamental to human life. In the scriptures, beginning with Genesis 2:7, breathing becomes associated with the divine breath (*ruah* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek) and thus is a symbol of God's life, God's Spirit, God's holy Wind that inspires and sustains all life, including human. In physical, cosmic, and sefirotic terms, breathing

¹⁷⁸For more ways and explanations for how to develop contemplative presence see the following sample of books. Yitzhak Buxbaum, Jewish Spiritual Practices (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1990); Edwards, Living in the Presence; Ken Kaisch, Finding God: A Handbook of Christian Meditation (New York: Paulist Press, 1994); Herman, Practicing the Presence of God; Henri J.M. Nouwen, Behold the Beauty: Praying with Icons (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1987); Hall, Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina; Carol Ochs and Kerry M. Olitzky, Jewish Spiritual Guidance: Finding Our Way to God (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997); and Thomas Ryan, Disciplines for Christian Living: Interfaith Perspectives (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

reveals the interdependence of life, the to-and-fro, inhalation and exhalation, contraction and expansion of existence. It is *our* breath that we breathe yet it is not our breath.

In a real sense, how we breathe tells us how we live. When we are frightened, we breathe in a way that is different than how we breathe when we lie down for an afternoon nap. When we are late for an appointment and forgo the elevator, running hurriedly up the stairs, we breathe differently than when we sit serenely in a chapel. The shallower and higher in the chest we breathe, the more rapidly we breathe. Rapid shallow breathing tends to reflect and reinforce tension in us. Such breathing also tends to produce matching thoughts: racing, shallow, panicky, or fleeting ones. When we unconsciously and instinctively draw in a deep breath and sigh, the body is sending us a different message we need to hear.

Being intentional about how we breathe is a way of living more consciously. In particular, taking the time to sit and be still, to slow down our breathing can be a healthy and holy extended moment. For people of faith, it can be a prayerful way of “coming into the presence of God,” the breath of life. For caregivers, it can become an opportunity to learn and practice contemplative presence that can be accessed when sitting with another person. In addition, attention to one’s breath can remind caregivers to be aware of how they are breathing while they are sitting with someone since our breath is often revealing.

The following are three simple examples of how being intent on our breath can be a spiritual discipline that cultivates greater presence. The first has no explicit spiritual context or content. It merely is an exercise of awareness. The second is similar to the first, except it consciously relates the breath, breathing, and simple presence to God. The third comes from the Jewish tradition and connects the breath with a name of God.

Breath Awareness

1. Take up a posture that is comfortable and restful. Close your eyes and your mouth.
2. Begin this exercise by spending about five minutes becoming aware of sensations in various parts of your body. Let the sensations you notice direct you from place to place on your body.
3. Then, move on to the awareness of your breathing. Decide that you will pay attention to every single breath. Now become aware of the air as it comes in and goes out through your nostrils. Do not concentrate on the air as it enters your lungs. Limit your awareness to the air as it passes through your nostrils. Feel its touch. Try to notice what part of the nostrils you feel the touch of the air when you inhale and in what part of the nostril you feel the touch of the air when you exhale.
4. Do not control your breathing. Do not attempt to deepen it. This is not an exercise in breathing but in awareness of your breathing. If your breathing is shallow, leave it that way. Do not interfere with it. Simply notice it.
5. Become aware, if you can, of the warmth or coldness of the air, its coldness when it comes in, its warmth when it goes out. You may also be aware that the amount of air that passes through one nostril is greater than the amount that passes through the other. Be sensitive and alert to the slightest, lightest touch of the air on your nostrils as you inhale and exhale.
6. Each time you are distracted, return with intention to your task, noticing the air as it passes in and out of your nostrils.

7. Continue this exercise for about 15 minutes (or 20 minutes total)¹⁷⁹

Breath Prayer

1. Sit in a comfortable straight back chair with your back straight, and your feet flat on the floor. Make sure your shoulders are not slouched and that your chin does not fall toward your chest. Lay your hands gently together on your lap, palms up, thumbs loose from your forefingers. Close your eyes. (If you are able, you also can do this in the lotus position on a pillow on the floor)
2. Become aware of your breathing. Softly notice the speediness of your breath and thoughts.
3. Remember your desire for God in the form of a prayer (e.g. *O God, you are my breath and my life*) or a wordless feeling.
4. Begin breathing slowly, deep down in your diaphragm-stomach area. Slowly fill your lungs with air. When your chest expands, and your breath reaches the “top,” hold your breath ever-so briefly, but without closing your throat.
5. Release your breath slowly, twice as slowly as you breathed in. Pause at the bottom of your breath with a still mind.
6. Continue this rhythm of breathing for a few minutes or longer, then do so with the specific intent of breathing in everything that is of God and breathing out all that is in your mind or body that is not. Do not think of anything in terms of content: simply retain a naked *intent* to slowly take in from head to toe all that is of God and to release slowly from within you whatever is not.

¹⁷⁹This exercise is the combination of two exercises as found in Anthony de Mello, Sadhana: A Way to God: Christian Exercises in Eastern Form, 5th ed. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 22-23.

7. Continue this exercise for about 20 minutes.¹⁸⁰

Explanation of the Exercise

Meditation (and/or contemplation) is not strictly a Christian phenomenon or practice. Although it is true that throughout Jewish history, meditation has more often than not been the secret and exclusive practice of a few small groups, in this regard it is not so different than the history of Christian experience. Until fairly recently, contemplative spirituality and meditative practices were not widely spoken of, encouraged, or easily accessed within either Jewish or Christian congregations. Like many persons reared in Christian homes, countless Jews have turned to Eastern traditions in order to find a contemplative tradition and practice for spiritual transformation, either not realizing or being suspicious of the meditative riches buried within their own faith tradition. Although not as prevalent in the contemporary Jewish community as in Christian circles, there is nonetheless a burgeoning movement within Judaism to revive, make accessible, and practice the meditative spirituality that has its roots in the mystical tradition of the Kabbalah.¹⁸¹

There is clear evidence in the early Kabbalistic writings that Jewish mystics used breathing practices similar to those of the yoga tradition. Among the various meditative methods found in the writings of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia (1240-1295), the first great Kabbalist to put Jewish meditation practices into formal writing, are practices that

¹⁸⁰This exercise is a slight variation of an exercise found in Edwards, *Living in the Presence*, 22.

¹⁸¹In his article on Jewish meditation, Stanley Kramer briefly identifies the major factors that determined the attitudes toward and practice of Jewish meditation throughout history. Kramer is one among many persons who are committed to responding to "a yearning for this kind of contemplative work for the Jewish soul" believing that "Jewish meditation could be a vehicle for the perpetuation of Jewish spiritual renewal into the twenty-first century." Stanley Z. Kramer, "Jewish Meditation: Healing Ourselves and Our Relationships," in *Opening the Inner Gates: New Paths in Kabbalah and Psychology*, Edward Hoffman, ed., (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1995), 225-26.

encouraged “working with a variety of sacred names and permeating the breath with the various letters of the different names of God.”¹⁸² One of the unique dimensions of Jewish practice is the reverence for and use of the highest name of God in Judaism contained within the Hebrew letters Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey, or YHVH, called the Tetragrammaton. The four letters together represent the integration of the spiritual and material worlds as well as the union of the male and female energies.¹⁸³ Stanley Kramer, a clinical psychologist and teacher of Kabbalistic meditation practices, explains:

The Yud represents the male aspect; it looks like a seed or sperm. The first Hey is the female principle and might be seen as a womb. The Yud and Hey are related to the spiritual aspects of *neshamah*. The Vav is also the male aspect; it has a phallic shape. The last Hey is, again, the female principle. The Vav and second Hey are considered the physical manifestations of the *neshamah*.¹⁸⁴

The letters can be written horizontally (see Diagram 1) and read right to left, or as is sometimes done, vertically (see Diagram 2) and read from the bottom to the top. When written in this latter way, the sacred name of God is depicted as a human figure: the Yud is the face, the first Hey is the shoulders or arms, the Vav is the spinal cord, and the second Hey is the pelvis, legs, and feet. These four letters are used in combination with the breath, which is connected with the *ruach* principle.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸²Ibid., 240.

¹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 227. For Kramer, “The goal in Jewish meditation is to be able to separate oneself from the identification of the *nefesh* and attach oneself to *ruach* with the possibility of bridging with *neshamah*.” Again, this presumes a tripartite spiritual view of the human person with the *nephesh* being the lowest or animal soul, the *ruach*, the divine spirit or that portion of the human self intermediate in nature between the *nephesh* and the *neshamah*, and the *neshamah* being the nonphysical, transcendent part of the human self often translated simply as “soul” referring to the suprasoul or higher self. *Tikkun ha nephesh*, understood as the effort to mend the soul is aided by meditation. Meditation aids this process of healing the inner person

(Diagram 1)



*The Tetragrammaton
(Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey),
written horizontally
from right to left*

(Diagram 2)



*The Tetragrammaton
(Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey),
written vertically from
top to bottom.*

By practicing the breath exercise below, one joins one's intention and attention (*kavanah* refers to both ideas) and unifies oneself with the name of God through cleaving (*devekut*) to these four letters which represent God or the highest principle.

Breath Prayer with the Name YHVH

1. Sit on the floor, cross-legged, or in a chair, with your spine erect.
2. Keep your eyes closed, and inhale and exhale consciously through the nostrils.

Put your full attention on the in-breath and out-breath right below your nostrils.
3. As you begin to relax, begin to visualize the letters of the Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey.

You can look at a printed image of the four letters to start.

by encouraging one to prayerfully attend to those parts of him or herself that are broken, imbalanced, in need of care or, if possible, repair and reconciliation. Meditation fosters becoming human and holy by taking a person up the ladder of the soul, if you will, from *nephesh* to *ruach* to *neshamah* where the meditator experiences communion with God.

4. When your mind is fully attended to the breath and the letters, close your eyes again and begin to see the Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey in your mind's eye. See the letters as black fire on white fire. Slowly begin to permeate your breath with these four letters. As you breath in, take in the Yud. On the out-breath exhale the Hey. On the next in-breath take in the Vav, and in exhalation let out the Hey.
5. Never say the four letters out loud. The practice should be done in a subtle manner, permeating the breath with the letters internally.
6. Continue to focus on the letters as you breathe in Yud, breathe out Hey, inhale Vav, and exhale Hey.
7. Do this for at least ten to fifteen minutes daily.¹⁸⁶

Pastoral Care as Creating Space

The kabbalistic tradition with which Abraham Heschel was familiar, with its highly symbolic, imagistic, and metaphorical language, offers us one “new” image that is especially suggestive, and I believe valuable, for caregivers who are trying to offer evocative care from a mystical perspective. It is the image of *tzimtzum*, the inventive formulation of Isaac Luria. In stark contrast to the images of the paternalistic-shepherd (“Father knows best”) and the professional expert who have something to “give,” this image offers another way of envisioning the posture and practice of the caregiver.

As we saw in Chapter Four, unlike the creation accounts in the Torah and the Zohar, both of which in their own way indicate that the initial movement of God (*Ein Sof*) in the act of creation was outward, Luria posits the opposite. In Lurianic kabbalah, divine withdrawal precedes divine emanation. *Tzimtzum* is the first divine movement of

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 241-42. This description is taken almost verbatim from Stanley Kramer's description.

the first divine act, and that act is one of contraction, retreat, self-limitation, not projection or emanation. In the beginning, when all there is is God, God freely, knowingly, and purposely pulls back from GodSelf, creating an empty space (*tehiru*), a holy hollow, where nondivine reality can come into existence. In one viable interpretation, it is love and munificence that compels God (*Ein Sof*) to withdraw and to create this sacred, womblike space so that the world can come into being. As an analogue for caregivers, this dynamic concept of *tzimtzum* helps us to see some of what is involved in a contemplative approach to care. In a mystical-prophetic approach, the caregiver translates the concept of *tzimtzum* into the attitude of *tzimtzum*

Earlier, I described divine presence as signaling the *towardness, forness, or withness* of God. The dynamism of presence, for example, as portrayed in sefirotic emanation or, as conceived of by many Christians in the Incarnation, is imagined as moving outward, as reaching out. I also indicated that presence is considered a constitutive dimension of a mystical or contemplative approach to human care. Yet, when we understand the initial movements of pastoral caregiving in light of *tzimtzum*, contemplative presence is expressed first not as a reaching out but as a pulling back. Here, presence is hospitality in the form of absence. Here the absence and presence necessary for the mystery of creation are linked in the mystery of being and required in the sacrament of care.

The contemplative caregiver is called to emulate God who willingly allows for absence to occur in order to make the world's presence possible. In his book, Beginning to Pray, the words of Russian Orthodox Archbishop Anthony Bloom are reminiscent of this attitude of absenting and instructive for pastoral caregivers. He writes:

To be poor financially is in a way much easier than to be poor inwardly, to have no attachments. This is very difficult to learn and something which happens gradually, from year to year. You really learn to value things, to look at people and see the radiant beauty which they possess—without the desire to possess them. To pluck a flower means to take possession of it, and it also means to kill it. The vow of poverty makes me appreciate things much more. But first of all one must learn to be free within oneself. There are moments when you must physically absent yourself in order to learn what it means for something or somebody to exist in their own right and not just as a mirror of your own emotions.¹⁸⁷

Just as in the beginning when *Ein Sof* deliberately and generously retreated in order for the world to come into existence, so too the pastoral caregiver pulls back and “gives ground” in order to make possible the continuous coming-into-being of the other.

Christians might be able to relate to this idea by way of the notion of *kenosis* (Greek, emptiness) spoken by St. Paul in Philippians 2:5-8 about Jesus:

who, though he was in the form
of God,
did not regard equality
with God
as something to be exploited,
but he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

The Christian pastoral theologian, James Dittes, actually defines ministry as “the art of making space for others to grow.”¹⁸⁸ About this image he comments:

That makes an apt metaphor for the ministry in the name of one who so relentlessly creates and recreates supporting life around us, whose own self-revelation leaves healthy enigma, who, as the supreme act of salvation, “emptied himself . . . humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:7-8 NJB). Ministry often requires a radical move, requires becoming a vacuum that enables others to loom large. Ministry is the constant sharpening and shaping of questions, more than the giving of answers. Ministry is the giving up of

¹⁸⁷Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray* (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), xiii.

¹⁸⁸James E. Dittes, *Re-calling Ministry*, ed. Donald Capps (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1999), 9.

authority and status and acclaim in ways that help others to discover their own authority and status and questions.¹⁸⁹

Within the context of pastoral counseling or spiritual direction, *tzimtzum* symbolizes the invitation and challenge to caregivers to release any operative attachments, to let go of any unchecked need to control or manipulate the other, to surrender any unconscious desire to possess the other person or to make them into their own image and likeness that may get in the way of the other “coming forth.”¹⁹⁰ The practice of *tzimtzum* means practicing silence, or learning restraint, saying less, using language to muse aloud and to evoke rather than to probe or question or diagnose.

Mirroring the original divine receptivity, all caregiving begins as an act of voluntary poverty and gracious hospitality. Heschel writes:

Regard for the self becomes only a vice by association: when associated with complete or partial disregard for other selves. Thus, the moral task is not how to disregard one’s own self but how to discover and be attentive to another self.¹⁹¹

Free and deliberate, this pulling back is not the result of self-abnegation, personal introversion, or timidity. Nor is it a sign of anticipatory defensiveness or the passivity inherent in passive-aggressive behavior. Rather, it is the intentional and prayerfully conscious choice to make room for the other. In one sense, this is evident and exercised by the caregiver doing what all good hosts do: make someone feel welcomed by word and gesture, by intonation and inflection of voice, by putting the other at ease, making

¹⁸⁹Ibid. It is Dittes’ opinion that women seem to be more comfortable with and more prone to this space-making ministry, not so much for biological reasons (making space to receive as opposed to making space to penetrate) or because of a “socially imposed passivity” but because they “are less harnessed into performance, solo performance, less required to be up.”

¹⁹⁰It is because of the invitation and challenge for caregivers to *let go*, that a regular contemplative practice (for example, Centering Prayer) is necessary, since this is where spiritual depth and interior breakthroughs occur.

¹⁹¹Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 141.

them feel comfortable, by being genuine, by creating an atmosphere of safety and reverence, by listening for and attending to the needs and desires of the guest.¹⁹²

In the deepest sense, *tzimtzum*, and the *tehiru* that is the resultant sacred space, is something that the caregiver allows to occur within himself or herself. As an intrapsychic phenomenon, it is a matter of the soul. Consequently, making room for the other is more difficult than it sounds, as often our availability is prevented by a crammed mind and “an overcrowded heart.”¹⁹³ In a personal anecdote, novelist and spiritual writer, Sue Monk Kidd, describes how difficult it is to have this attitude of *tzimtzum* let alone to act on it. She writes:

In February, my husband and I attend a party where a lot of strangers stand around holding tiny plates of food, trying to make conversation. Midway through it, I realize that my interaction with these people has been more like a silent collision of egos than anything else. I’ve been full of myself, back again riding a train where my own image lights up every window. I’ve overflowed with my own ideas, with a variety of self-motivated feelings, and I see clearly how my fullness undermines my ability to be present, how it erodes the possibility of mindful availability.¹⁹⁴

Just as Archbishop Bloom realizes receiving the other requires inner poverty, Kidd realizes that hospitality requires creating an empty space within herself. These are different ways of naming the same reality, the same movement. Kidd continues:

The friendly, empty space must be created *within* the host. I think of the bowl in my study, the one I made myself from a small, round gourd. I spent a whole day cleaning out the inside, painting it green, waxing it to a sheen. I thought I’d fill it with something. But I never did. Now I see that I was engaged in creating a vessel of emptiness, a thing to hold a

¹⁹²Catholic Worker, Dorothy Day, spoke of comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. It is my belief that the latter is only effective if trust and reverence are present as a result of experiencing the former. A mystical-prophetic pastoral care is comprised of both acts to which Ms. Day refers.

¹⁹³Kidd, “Live Welcoming to All,” 10.

¹⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 10.

beautiful nothing. Nothingness like a woman who is with child. And that out of this Nothingness God was born.¹⁹⁵

As the mystic lives in a spirit of radical openness and receptivity to what is, so too the contemplative caregiver assumes a posture of receptivity in the presence of the other. Ideally, in mystical caregiving, it is not that “nothing” is expected, but that nothing is presumed, prejudged, or projected. In this way, in the spirit of radical susceptibility, the caregiver becomes a vessel of emptiness in which the nothingness is beautiful, evocative, and hopeful, not barren or angst-ridden. Effective and compassionate caregiving begins with the seemingly simple but in actuality difficult task of creating space for the other, whether offered as long term therapy, crisis intervention, grief counseling, spiritual guidance, a chance meeting with a parishioner in a shopping center parking lot, or being asked by a homeless woman for some spare change. Just as being contemplatively present is learned in contemplation and contemplative practices, so too is being contemplatively “absent.” Although the image of the safe, nurturing womb where the other can come into being has implications for how pastors, spiritual directors, and counselors create a welcoming physical environment and sacred space where they meet with parishioners, clients, and directees respectively, as mentioned above, the image of *tzimtzum* is first a challenge and call to the caregiver’s inner reality and daily life and second how that lived reality is communicated and offered to the recipient of care.¹⁹⁶

Another author whose comments shed light on the idea of *tzimtzum* is Simone Weil. The way she describes *attention* in her essay, “Reflections On the Right Use of

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 11.

¹⁹⁶In this regard, Heschel states that when a person is said to have a presence that what is meant is that their outwardness communicates something of their inner truth just as when Isaiah exclaims “The whole earth is full of your glory” (6:3) suggests that “the outwardness of the world communicates something of the indwelling greatness of God. Heschel, God in Search of Man, 83. Some Christians refer to this as sacramentality.

School Studies” helps us to understand further what the attitude of *tzimtzum* might entail for caregivers. What she writes reveals the symbiotic relationship between presence and receptivity, indicating that *tzimtzum* involves not only creating a “psychic” space for the other but also the willingness and vulnerability to be *acted upon* by another. This is why contemplative prayer and practices are the most fitting places to learn to embody *tzimtzum*. For caregivers, this readiness to be acted upon and affected by the other of which Weil speaks and that is reminiscent of Heschel’s description of divine pathos (i.e. passibility), is a reminder that the attitude of *tzimtzum* means contemplative caregivers must resist the compulsion to be helpful, the need to appear competent, the push to speak, the rush to diagnose, and the hasty or agenda-driven search for truth. What she says about a person in relationship to his or her studies holds meaning for caregivers embodying *tzimtzum* in their relationships with others. Weil writes:

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object; it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we acquired which we are forced to make use of . . . Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it.

All wrong translations, all absurdities in geometry problems, all clumsiness of style, and all faulty connection of ideas in compositions and essays, all such things are due to the fact that thought has seized upon some idea too hastily, and being thus prematurely blocked, is not open to the truth. The cause is always that we have wanted to be too active; we have wanted to carry out a search. . . . We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them.¹⁹⁷

In situations of caregiving, for example in pastoral counseling or spiritual direction, the antithesis of receptivity is not usually manifested by caregivers as overt hostility but as

¹⁹⁷Simone Weil, “Reflections On the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God,” in George A. Panichas, ed. *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: David McKay Co., 1977), 49.

the premature need or inappropriate drive to give the other something the caregivers believe they have that the other does not possess but needs. The opposite of the spirit of receptivity is the unchecked need to inject or project, what Weil calls wanting “to be too active.” The ego-driven, hasty search is the nemesis of contemplative waiting. The contemplative caregiver must be constantly aware of the temptation to think too much, do too much, and say too much. As the late Henri Nouwen cautions, “Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.”¹⁹⁸

The image of *tzimtzum* encourages caregivers not to focus on what he or she needs to “give” the other but instead to assume a contemplative posture of waiting upon the truth: empty, not seeking, yet inviting and gently evocative and ready to receive. It encourages caregivers to consider themselves not as possessing and dispensing the truth but rather as creating a holy space where other persons can discover the truth of their lives. Nouwen says it this way:

The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own.¹⁹⁹

Psychotherapist and teacher of Jewish mysticism, Estelle Frankel, uses the example of the parent-child relationship to explain the role of *tzimtzum*. She writes:

Tzimtzum begins during pregnancy, when the mother makes room inside herself for her baby to develop into a separate, autonomous being. After the child is born and as it continues to mature, parents must provide a different kind of space—a “psychic space”—in which the child will

¹⁹⁸Henri J. M. Nouwen, Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1975), 51.

¹⁹⁹*Ibid.*

develop its autonomous self. For instance, when a child is learning to take its first steps, a parent must step back and allow room for the child to stumble and fall on its own. If the parent is too helpful, the child will never learn to walk on its own. A good parent knows how to balance love with some measure of *tzimtzum*, or limitation on the expression of that love that takes into account the child's needs for space, autonomy, and limits. This kind of restraint on the part of a parent is ultimately also an expression of love, though it may not be immediately apparent.²⁰⁰

Frankel is not using this example to suggest caregivers become parentified figures to clients, congregants, or directees. As it translates for caregiving, the metaphor reminds caregivers to resist the need or urge to do for the other, robbing them of doing their own soul work for themselves. Just as parents rush and do too much, so too can caregivers.

Frankel's words remind caregivers that hospitality is paradoxical in more ways than Nouwen point out. Creating a "friendly emptiness" makes room for more than friendliness. Hospitality comes with a risk, as it creates a space not only for the lovely and pleasing but also for the shadowy, appalling, and the repulsive as well. The attitude and posture of *tzimtzum* is no cozy, tame amusement. The process of re-creation is not to be confused with playful recreation. As many expectant mothers know, creating a space for another is not always easy, and is frequently painful and difficult. Although we must avoid reducing an evocative metaphor to a direct allegorical comparison with literal one-to-one correspondence, caregivers would do well to remember that in the Lurianic myth, as Frankel reminds us, the same withdrawal that enables existence and creates the possibility for human autonomy and free choice, also allows for the possibility of evil to exist. She states:

[I]n the apparent eclipse of the divine, there is room for human autonomy to become so extreme that we forget our connection to the source of all

²⁰⁰Estelle Frankel, Sacred Therapy: Jewish Spiritual Teachings on Emotional Healing and Inner Wholeness (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2005), 28.

life. An exaggerated sense of the separation/autonomy is, according to the Kabbalah, the root of all evil and suffering.²⁰¹

When *tzimtzum* is enacted in care, as a contemplative orientation, it means caregivers are invited to give up their subtle and not-so-subtle ways of staying in control of the situation or of the other, thus increasing the chance that they will face the good, the bad, and the ugly in the other.

Returning to Simone Weil, her comments capture the essence of *tzimtzum* as an attitude of contemplative engagement and care in which caregivers agree to receive the other in all his or her truth. Bringing together the two main features of hospitality, presence and receptivity, she describes the ability to be with another person, to love our neighbor, maintaining that this receptive presence involves knowing how to look at the other person in a certain way. She writes:

This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth.

Only he who is capable of attention can do this.²⁰²

Hospitality is an essential component of the Jewish-Christian tradition. Lurianic Kabbalah offers caregivers a provocative image of divine hospitality that can be a source of guidance and encouragement in their ministry. The image of being present to another as an empty vessel, as the life-giving womb where the other gestates and gradually comes into being is a reminder of the evocative and receptive dimension of mystical care. Poet

²⁰¹Frankel, *Sacred Therapy*, 28.

²⁰²*Ibid.*, 51.

Carolyn Forché says, “When you attend to something with true meditative attention, you awaken it in a special way.”²⁰³ Again, Henri Nouwen states it well:

We cannot . . . change other people by our convictions, stories, advice and proposals, but we can offer a space where people are encouraged to disarm themselves, to lay aside their occupations and preoccupations and to listen with attention and care to the voices speaking in their own center.²⁰⁴

The premise of this approach to care is that the engaged but receptive posture of reverent, patient waiting by the caregiver, affects recipients in the deep core of their being, helping them to feel safe enough to dare to come out in the open as they are and to come into being as they yearn to be.

Exercise

Developing a regular practice of *receptive prayer* is an important way for caregivers (and those for whom they care) to grow in their openness to God. Creating a vacancy for God in contemplative prayer forms in caregivers the ability to create a vacancy for others in the act of care.²⁰⁵ Because it is a receptive and not a concentrative form of prayer, Centering Prayer, in particular, is a beneficial contemplative practice for caregivers who are trying to learn how to practice *tzimtzum*. “Receptive prayer is a form of contemplative prayer that allows us to get out of the way and let divine grace work freely in us.”²⁰⁶

²⁰³ As quoted in Kidd, “Living Welcoming to All,” 10.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 54.

²⁰⁵ See Gregory C. Stanczak and Donald E. Miller, Engaged Spirituality: Spirituality and Social Transformation in Mainstream American Religious Traditions (Los Angeles: Center for Religion and Civic Culture: University of Southern California, 2002). This research project indicates that those most actively engaged in public service tend to be equally committed to spiritual practices that motivate and sustain them.

²⁰⁶ Teasdale, Mystic Heart, 131. The opposite of receptive kinds of contemplative prayer are *concentrative* prayer. Concentrative prayer is a much more active form that requires our constant effort.

Father Thomas Keating explains:

Centering Prayer is a method of prayer that comes out of the Christian tradition, principally The Cloud of Unknowing, by an anonymous fourteenth-century author, and St. John of the Cross. It brings us into the presence of God and thus fosters the contemplative attitudes of listening and receptivity. It is not contemplation in the strict sense, which in the Catholic tradition has always been regarded as a pure gift of the Spirit, but rather it is a *preparation* for contemplation by reducing the obstacles caused by the hyperactivity of our minds and of our lives.²⁰⁷

Centering Prayer is a method of cultivating contemplation understood not just as awareness but as receptivity. It is a discipline designed to reduce the obstacles in contemplative prayer by refining one's intuitive faculties and learning to withdraw from the ordinary flow of thoughts. The fundamental disposition of Centering Prayer can be described variously: opening to God, waiting patiently for God, letting go to God. It cultivates and involves spiritual attentiveness to divine presence. Those who are faithful to the practice of Centering Prayer grow in their capacity and willingness to give way to the divine who does most of the work. The "work" of the pray-er is simply to make him or herself more receptive to the presence of God. The aim of Centering Prayer is to cultivate interior silence so that our whole being can open to God, the Ultimate Mystery and Infinite Lover, beyond any words, thoughts or emotions, that is, beyond the psychological content of the present moment.²⁰⁸ Transformed to the practice of care, it is a vital way to learn how to create a space for others by engaging in deep listening and contemplative receptivity. The following is a simple description of the Centering Prayer

Mantric meditation, the Jesus Prayer, devotions like the rosary, kabbalistic practices of meditation working with the Hebrew letters, and prayerful veneration of icons are examples of a concentrative approach to the awakening and development of contemplation.

²⁰⁷Keating, Intimacy with God, 11.

²⁰⁸Thomas Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel (New York: Amity House, 1986)

Method. Centering Prayer can be used by caregivers to deepen their own intimacy with God, to develop a contemplative way of being that will carry over into the practice of care, and to teach and foster contemplative living in persons and communities for whom they care. It involves four basic guidelines.²⁰⁹

Centering Prayer

Take a comfortable position that will enable you to sit still. Close your eyes. The first step in the practice of Centering Prayer is choosing a sacred word. The word is referred to as sacred not because of its meaning but because it points toward or represents the intent of the pray-er to consent to the presence and action of God within her. What makes it sacred is the intention (in the Jewish tradition, *kavanah*). Keating makes clear this is a prayer of intent and consent not content. The word should be any word of one to four syllables. Examples are: *Adonai* ("Lord"), *Abba* ("Father"), *Amma* ("Mother"), *Jesus*, *Emmanuel* ("God with us"), *Shekinah* ("Indwelling Presence" or "Glory"), *Ruah* ("Spirit"), *amen*, *peace*, *open*, or *presence*. Some recommend using a word that is from a language the pray-er does not speak. The advantage here is that unfamiliarity adds somewhat to the sense of mystery and prevents undue attention being given to the *meaning* of the word. Pray-ers should remember that "the word is not the thing." The word does not receive the attention. Rather, the word carries the intention of surrendering to the divine presence within.

Second, gently introduce the sacred word into your imagination. Keating says, as lightly "as if you were laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton." Keep thinking the

²⁰⁹For a succinct explanation of the history of contemplative prayer, what contemplative prayer is not, and a thorough explanation of the practice of Centering Prayer, see Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart.

word, accepting it in whatever form it arises. Don't hold onto it. It is not a mantra meant to be repeated over and over. Let it come and go as it will. This is the receptive way.

The third step involves what and what not to do when other thoughts arise during Centering Prayer. Wayne Teasdale reminds us that when it comes to contemplative prayer thoughts are an occupational hazard of being human. They are unavoidable. The Indian tradition refers to them as being like noisy monkeys chattering in the trees. Keating describes "thoughts" as being like boats sitting on a river so packed together that you cannot see the river that holds them up. He explains:

A 'thought' in the context of this prayer is any perception that crosses the inner screen of consciousness. We are normally aware of one object after another passing across the inner screen of consciousness: images, memories, feelings, external objects. When we slow down that flow for a little while, space begins to appear between the boats. Up comes the reality on which they are floating.²¹⁰

During Centering Prayer, whenever you become aware that you are thinking some other thought, focusing on the "boats," simply let them float on down the river by returning gently to the sacred word, thus renewing your intent to assent to the loving divine presence and action within you. Whatever you do, do not fight the thoughts. Keating notes:

The effectiveness of this prayer does not depend on how distinctly you say the sacred word or how often, but rather on the gentleness with which you introduce it into your imagination and the promptness with which you return to it when you are hooked on some other thought.²¹¹

The final guideline regards transitioning back to normal awareness. When you come to the end of your Centering Prayer Period, ease out. Do not jump up and race into

²¹⁰Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart, 110.

²¹¹Ibid.

your everyday activities. Take a few minutes to slowly come out of the experience.

Keating and other teachers recommend a twenty minute sit in the morning and a twenty minute sit in the evening, preferably not immediately following a meal. When done together in a group, at a synagogue or church, for example, he recommends two twenty minute sits with a five to seven minute contemplative walk in between.²¹²

Pastoral Care as Cultivating Contemplative Engagement

As we have seen, a mystical care that is evocative and formational seeks to rediscover, retrieve, and renew the divine dignity of humankind. Heschel warns:

The overriding issue of this hour in the world and Western civilization is the *humanity of man*. Man is losing his true image and shaping his life in the image of anti-man.²¹³

For Heschel, nothing less than humankind's humanity is at stake in the effort to revive and cultivate "the sense of wonder and mystery of being alive," and the simultaneous "rebellion against reducing existence to mere fact or function."²¹⁴ For Heschel, the breadth, essence, and signs of significant human being are perhaps best captured though not exhausted by the terms radical amazement and human sympathy both of which, in their own unique ways join presence and engagement in human responsiveness. Authentic human living is signaled by *feeling* the full grace and gravity of a given reality or situation, by the willingness of the human person *to be moved* and by *the readiness to respond* to that which moves one, whether it means being moved by the sight of an

²¹²Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart, 110-11; Teasdale, Mystic Heart, 132-33. Although Keating writes from a decisively Christian perspective including the theological basis for Centering Prayer, I see no reason why Centering Prayer need be Christocentric and limited to Christians.

²¹³Heschel, "No Religion Is an Island," in S. Heschel, ed., *Moral Grandeur*, 275.

²¹⁴*Ibid.*

expansive valley of wildflowers (wonder and awe), by the sense of God's presence (prayer and worship), by the unfathomable surprise of being (indebtedness and gratefulness), by the awareness of one's sins (compunction and repentance), or by a news photo of child soldiers abducted or recruited by force (anguish and compassion). There is a need for evocative care since what is an innate capacity in the human person, *the capacity to be moved*, must nonetheless be activated and developed like a spiritual muscle lest its non-use becomes a chronic condition.

Similarly, *the readiness to respond* points to the need for formative care since having the capacity to be moved does not automatically translate into a desire to respond or into an actual response. One way to explain the aim of mystical-prophetic care is to say that care is expressed by evoking wonder as well as by offering sympathy, by cultivating awe as well as by extending compassionate presence, by trying to give form to radical amazement as well as by enabling the transformation of persons, communities, and the world so that all are in harmony with the dream of God. A mystical-prophetic life grounded in the theology of care explicated above is most completely realized as a sense of solidarity with all life, moral capacity, nonviolence, self-knowledge, selfless service, simplicity of lifestyle, daily practice, and serving as a prophetic witness in the causes of justice, peace, and protecting creation.²¹⁵

The contemplative life is the intentional effort to "cleanse the doors of perception," to use William Blake's phrase, so that the onlooker can see what is there and become a passionate participant in the reality of what is seen: the sublime, the beautiful, the awe-inspiring, the grotesque, the tragic, the horrific whichever the case may be.

²¹⁵These eight practical elements are described by Wayne Teasdale as a meeting place for a universal spirituality. See Teasdale, Mystic Heart.

Contemplation and contemplative practice, and therefore contemplative caregiving which invites and supports them, cleanse a person's awareness of and activates one's desire to respond to the mystery, to the meaning behind the mystery, and to the mercy within the meaning that we can sense but never fully grasp. Heschel asserts, "Prayer teaches us what to aspire to."²¹⁶ The praxis of a mystical or contemplative pastoral care is aimed at cultivating and forming contemplative attitudes and "habits of the heart" so that individuals and communities know what to aspire to and is to the end of renewing humanity and the world.

What mystical-prophetic caregivers are trying to evoke and form in persons and communities is a comprehensive *way of being* (an attitude) in which characteristic ways of perception and acts of engagement (attitudes) are rooted and formed in personal and communal practice and lived experience. In this sense, by attitudes is meant more than a mood or disposition. Contemplative attitudes are those embodied perspectives learned in contemplation and contemplative practices that alternately inspire, shape, guide, and reflect a holistic orientation to life. This orientation or consciousness is an entire manner of being that is inclusive of but more than the sum total of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Contemplative attitudes combine to form an attitude or approach toward all reality and life that is called mystical or contemplative which in turn, if authentic, includes or leads to service and compassionate action. The task for mystical caregivers and congregations is to explore and cultivate ways "to live in the midst of the world in a

²¹⁶Heschel, Quest for God, 7.

manner that embodies these principles of contemplative vision and self-transformation.”²¹⁷

One of the principle ways a mystically-oriented care seeks to bring about this contemplative vision and way of being is by reviving and cultivating the antecedents of faith noted by Heschel, and this by promoting contemplative practices and supporting contemplative living. In addition, a mystical-prophetic care looks for situations and places where persons and communities are more likely to encounter the sublime, sense the mystery, and develop the essential attitudes and sensibilities compatible with being an image of God.²¹⁸ Without reducing mystical-prophetic care to a program or educational curriculum, it is important to point out that in pastoral contexts (that is, within the setting and situation of faith communities) individual and congregational mystical-prophetic care does not just happen. It is first and foremost, a way of being, yes. But it is an intentional way of being, a deliberate way of living that is the result of a prior and particular vision. As Thoreau, the American Transcendentalist, knew well, to live deliberately is a conscious, premeditated, and ongoing choice. So too, for Heschel, who writes:

Living cannot be treated piecemeal; it must be treated as a whole. Living is circulation; the elements of spirit absorbed by it are digested and burned. Injecting good manners or rules of conduct will not solve the problem. Life is in need of an all-embracing significant form, which should have bearing directly or indirectly on every aspect of it.²¹⁹

A mystical-prophetic care not only summons and supports living a deliberately contemplative life, but more so aims to hold up, encourage, and sustain the mystical-prophetic philosophy of life as “an all-embracing significant form” capable of bringing

²¹⁷Finley, Contemplative Heart, 20.

²¹⁸Some of these ways are discussed below.

²¹⁹Heschel, “No Time for Neutrality,” in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 76.

about self-transformation and committing people to work for the transformation of society and the world. Pastoral care is neither exhausted nor defined by single atomized acts of care. Within communities of faith, pastoral leaders and caregivers must seek to create an atmosphere and climate, a physical environment and a temporal rhythm that clearly signal that the mystical dimension of faith and living is important to their particular community and essential for the future of humanity. As is explained above and in greater depth below, mystical-prophetic care fosters mystical and prophetic living by cultivating a sense of wonder, awe, reverence, a sense of the mystery and preciousness of all being, the attitude of gratefulness, the interconnection of all life, a sense of sympathy for God and compassion for others by deliberately creating and sustaining a contemplative atmosphere, environment, rhythm, vision, and action. Combining serious study with opportunities for experiential learning, congregational pastoral care especially will be intentional and imaginative in its use of such things as space, time, nature, silence, light and darkness, evocative symbols, and ritual actions to evoke and support the mystic character and way of life. Individual and congregational mystical-prophetic care keep in mind the modes of authentic human living that move from wonder and awe to reverence and gratitude to praise and faith to sympathy and care to justice and compassionate concern for the cosmos. Mystical-prophetic care does whatever is helpful in sustaining, encouraging, and making possible this mystical-prophetic movement. It is not a one-size fits all program but an all-embracing, constantly-renewing form of caregiving that is guided by and seeks to embody the essential principles of this comprehensive way of life. It must be brought to bear on all pastoral functions, tasks, and activities: staff relations,

liturgy, preaching, religious education and spiritual formation, organizational leadership, community formation and recreation, service and social justice, mission and outreach.

Let us look now at some fundamental ways that caregivers can evoke and help other persons and communities give form to a mystical consciousness and way of life.

Cultivating Wonder and Awe

In her book, The Silent Cry, Dorothee Soelle raises the question whose affirmative answer is one of the impetuses for a mystically-oriented pastoral care: “Can amazement, the radical wonderment of the child, be learned again?”²²⁰ Not only does Heschel believe that wonder can be awakened and reawakened in humanity, but he believes that it is incumbent upon human persons, especially people of faith (and even more so upon caregivers) to evoke and cultivate this fundamental attitude that is necessary for full human living, as well as for social change and cosmic harmony. One of the most important influences for me in realizing the need for a mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral theology and care was Rabbi Heschel’s insight regarding the decisive role that radical amazement plays in the birth of faith, the development of significant being, and its intimate and dynamic relationship to compassion. It is Heschel’s vision of authentic human living—wonder that gives rise to awe which in turn gives rise to faith, gratefulness, wisdom, compassion, and work for justice and peace—that informs and guides the task and aim of a mystical-prophetic approach to care.

²²⁰Soelle, Silent Cry, 91.

As discussed earlier, wonder is a pretheological, precognitive, and presymbolic reality.²²¹ Heschel states:

I say we need a revival of the premises and antecedents of faith because it is useless to offer conclusions of faith to those who do not possess the prerequisites of faith. It is useless to speak of the holy to those who have failed to cultivate the ingredients of being human.

Prior to theology is depth theology; prior to faith are premises or prerequisites of faith such as a sense of wonder, radical amazement, reverence, a sense of the mystery of all being. Man must learn, for example, to question his false sense of sovereignty.²²²

This is one explanation why there are so many who identify themselves as people of faith and yet who are so amystical, so noncontemplative: they live conclusions of faith without a personal familiarity with the prerequisites of faith. In a lecture titled, "The God of Israel and Christian Renewal," Rabbi Heschel writes, "The task of Christian renewal, I should like to hope, is above all the renewal of man, and the renewal of man is the *renewal of reverence*."²²³

Wonder is both an antecedent of faith and an impetus of faith. It is an antecedent of faith because wonderment is a response not to the divine per se but to the wondrous or sublime dimension of reality which, Heschel maintains, is an allusion to God. Because the sublime suggests the divine, wonder elicits and nurtures faith. "Awareness of the

²²¹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 115, 117. Heschel maintains: "The encounter with reality does not take place on the level of concepts through the channels of logical categories; concepts are second thoughts. All conceptualization is symbolization, an act of accommodation of reality to the human mind. The living encounter with reality takes place on a level that precedes conceptualization, on a level that is responsive, *immediate, preconceptual, and presymbolic*." He believes that all great things that happen to the soul happen not on the level of discursive thinking but on the level of wonder and radical amazement where, for example, art, philosophy, and authentic religion come into being. It is "the living encounter with reality" and with God as the Most Real Reality with which contemplation and the contemplative life concerns itself and that a mystical-prophetic pastoral care seeks to foster, encourage, and sustain.

²²²Heschel, "No Religion Is an Island," in S. Heschel, ed., Moral Grandeur, 276.

²²³*Ibid.*, 275.

divine begins with wonder.”²²⁴ Later, as part of faith, what was once a response to the sublime dimension of reality becomes an intentional expression and constitutive dimension of it since faith acknowledges God as the source of the wondrous and of the ineffable mystery. Merkle elucidates Heschel’s view by speaking of the *experience* of wonder and of *an attitude* of wonder.²²⁵ The experience of wonder can neither be dictated nor predicted. It is an inexplicable gift. Merkle explains:

There may be times when, unprepared, we are struck with wonder, yet it is up to us to keep the spirit of wonder alive. Like love, wonder is both an effortless happening and the result of constant effort. We fall in love and we create love. Love happens to us and we make love happen. So it is with wonder.²²⁶

The attitude of wonder makes one receptive and ready to receive the experience or gift of wonder. The Jesuit priest and psychotherapist, Anthony de Mello, captures this relationship in a simple parable titled, “Vigilance.”

“Is there anything I can do to make myself enlightened?”
 “As little as you can do to make the sun rise in the morning.”
 “Then of what use are the spiritual exercises you prescribe?”
 “To make sure you are not asleep when the sun begins to rise.”²²⁷

Just as it is, the world is radiant with wonder as is being itself. Creation and being are imbued with mystery. And yet for many if not most humans the experience of wonder is only intermittent because the attitude of radical amazement is deteriorating or already

²²⁴Heschel, God in Search of Man, 46.

²²⁵Merkle, Genesis of Faith, 154.

²²⁶Ibid.

²²⁷Anthony de Mello, One Minute Wisdom (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 11.

altogether missing. What are needed, therefore, are ways to enable and enhance perception so that we are awake to see “the divinity of what just is.”²²⁸

The problem, history shows, as Heschel and the other authors indicate, is that as civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Indifference to the sublime nature of reality is taken for granted, which is the root of sin, and the beginning of the eclipse of God. No longer characterized by a religious ignorance that leads to humility, reverence, and awe, society is contagious with an ignorance that leads to conceit and complacency.²²⁹ What is needed is *an attitude* of wonder and awe that is the result of being intentionally aware and appreciative of and responsive to the incomprehensible surprise of being, of creation, of others, of oneself, of being able to wonder at all, of the presence and pathos of God. Other than compassion, which according to Heschel is the ultimate effect of wonder and the essential sign of being human, radical amazement is the chief characteristic of the authentically religious person’s attitude toward history, nature, the world, and life itself.²³⁰ Therefore, if caregivers hope to assist and accompany people as they grow and develop toward full human becoming, it is paramount that they begin to cultivate radical amazement in our children lest those youngsters wake up one day as retired seniors and discover there is no spiritual income on which to draw.²³¹

If, as Heschel maintains, life without wonder is not worth living, if radical amazement engenders an appreciation for being and fosters a sense of oneness with all reality, and if compassion, which is the index of mature humanity, is conceived, gestates,

²²⁸Finley, Contemplative Heart, 19.

²²⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 56-57.

²³⁰*Ibid.*, 45.

²³¹The image is Heschel’s. See “To Grow in Wisdom,” Insecurity of Freedom, 79.

and grows in wonderment, then one of the primary responsibilities of a mystical-prophetic caregiver is to seek ways and means to help others awaken or reawaken to wonder, to awe, and to encourage the practice of radical amazement. The call of a mystical-prophetic pastoral care is to cultivate and support in people and communities the ongoing formation of an attitude of perpetual surprise, existential humility, radical amazement, reverence, and gratefulness.

In addition to preaching and teaching a theology of radical amazement that not only is biblically-based but also a universal theme in the world religions, there are two primary ways that individual and congregational pastoral care can evoke and help give form to people and communities of amazement: The first way is by looking for and, when possible, creating situations and places where the environment can be “guru,” where the situation or place teaches us about or becomes a pathway to marveling at being itself, becoming conscious of an interior life, pondering the meaning of one’s existence, learning to be present where we are, sensing the ineffable, appreciating the wondrous, being confronted by the awesome or the awful, being aware of mystery, and sensing a felt presence of God.²³² Such an approach is centered in *just being*, in experience, and is not content-driven.

Heschel makes it clear that the sense of wonder is not the same as knowledge of God but that it “[leads] to a plane where the question about God becomes an inescapable concern.”²³³ In this regard, the most effective ways and means of evoking wonder that lead to the plane where we sense or experience the presence of God are often in and

²³²The phrase “environment as guru” comes from Brother David Steindl-Rast, *A Listening Heart: The Spirituality of Sacred Sensuousness* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), 8-17.

²³³Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 118-19. See also *Man Is Not Alone*, 68.

through the most primal, for example, in nature. Joseph Cornell, a pre-eminent nature educator, writes:

The unutterable beauty of a blossom. The grace of a high-flying bird. The roar of wind in the trees: At one time or another in our lives, nature touches. . . all of us in some personal, special way. Her immense mystery opens to us a little of its stunning purity, reminding us of a Life that is greater than the little affairs of man.²³⁴

Wonder is nourished by opportunities *to observe and experience* the intricate, intense, or immense workings of the natural world, the fundamental elements of earth, air, fire, or wind; the forces that constitute the weather, especially cold, wind, rain, and snow; the rhythms and the signs of the seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, or the movement of the day from sunrise to sunset.

When my daughter was in grade school she was part of an alternative Scouting group. One late afternoon her scout leader led a hike up a mountain trail until they reached a vista from where they could watch the sun set. As the sun slid down to meet the visible horizon, the leader said, "Let's be totally silent from now until the sun completely disappears." This was an example of evoking wonder as an antecedent of faith. Perhaps for some girls or some parents it was an allusion to the divine. But the activity and invitation did not presume or promote faith. Yet, it appeared to be for all a "moving" moment, an extended moment in which the sublime dimension of reality was taken in by or took in the observers. Combining this simple invitation with the depth of the stillness and the silence of the group, the exquisiteness of the setting sun, and the changing palette of colors that washed across the sky was an invitation to wonder, and for Heschel, wonder is an entrée to the divine. Mystical care will insure not only that these types of

²³⁴Quoted in Aline D. Wolf, Nurturing the Spirit in Non-sectarian Classrooms (Hollidaysburg, PA: Parent Child Press, 1996), 72.

experiences are not rare in the life of a child or young person but regularly encourage them in adults as well. This encouragement can happen in and through a variety of pastoral ministries: preaching, teaching, counseling, guiding, or others.

Another time, the public elementary school my children attended held a “Star-Gazing Night” in which some parents brought a high-powered telescope to search the heavens. As the children and parents waited their turn to look through the telescope, others lay flat on their backs on the playground asphalt in the darkness of the night and stared at the sky. Later I half-mused and half-lamented, “This event should be happening at churches and synagogues where people proclaim Psalm 19.”

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

(vv. 1-4)

Within the community of faith, a mystically-committed and oriented care will insure that the same types of activities (practices) occur. They are fundamental and requisite acts of mystical pastoral care. In explicitly religious settings, people need to be careful not to try too hard to make them either “religious” moments or catechetical opportunities. Often it is just best to let them be, allowing the poignancy of the moment to be enough, however loosely or explicitly experienced within the community of faith. We also need to be ready to have our well-made plans undermined by the subversive ways of wonder itself. After all, “to be moved” has a double meaning: to be affected and to be dislocated. I know of a Jesuit novice who brought a group of inner-city kids to the

large country property of his order's regional Novitiate and retreat center. He had planned a day of swimming, tennis, and basketball. But for hours on end, all the kids wanted to do was roll down the sprawling green hills. No gear, no equipment, just squeals and revelry evoked by gravity and more grass than they had ever seen in their lives.

A sense of wonder can be evoked and nurtured through planned or unexpected encounters with darkness, light, beauty, clouds, thunderstorms, snowflakes, wildlife, trees, flowers, insects, or rock formations. Certain things and how they are used can elicit a sense of reverence and awe: things like individual and collective silence, chant, candle light, oil, bread, drink, water, prayer, incense, or movement.²³⁵

Each year for several years I led a three-day, two-night retreat in the mountains for a parish group that met throughout an entire year on a weekly basis. A third of the retreatants were returnees, most of them team leaders, and the other two-thirds were people making the retreat for the first time. Each year the retreat was different but some elements remained the same. On the second night of the retreat when it was completely dark, I would lead the group up a steep hill to a clearing where lighted luminarias were placed in a large circle. Then I would invite everyone into the circle where I taught them a circle dance and the words to a simple and beautiful piece of music. One year we danced under a full moon. Another year we danced in four inches of new fallen snow. Another year we danced in the bitter cold with a fog so thick the people across from us in the circle were ghostly silhouettes. Each year the same dance, the same music, the same steps, the same hand-to-hand passes, the same bows, the same brief meeting of the passerby's eyes. Each year persons moving alone and together, coming round to where

²³⁵ As we will see, a contemplatively oriented life necessarily will involve not only encounters with nature but also the practice of prayerful silence.

they started from, only now somehow different, never to be the same again. Each year the same dance yet somehow experienced as utterly unique and unanimously profound by men and women both, dancers and non-dancers alike, marked by a sense of joy and delight, reverence and awe. And every year without fail, from the many significant experiences of the weekend, it was the dance that people took home with them. Years later it was the dance that they remembered. It was the dance that made them feel alive and part of the ineffable, mysterious, cosmic dance of God.²³⁶

The second way that pastoral caregivers can foster the attitudes indigenous to mysticism is one that is obvious and essential, yet frequently overlooked. Dorothee Soelle simply calls it “the practice of amazement.” I call it the spirituality of “oohing” and “aahing.”²³⁷ Heschel says, “We must keep alive the sense of wonder through deeds of wonder.”²³⁸ In her book, The Sense of Wonder, zoologist and biologist, Rachel Carson writes:

If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.

If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder without any such gift from the fairies, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.²³⁹

Wonderment is best promulgated by wonder-mentors.

²³⁶Merton, New Seeds, 296-97.

²³⁷Soelle, Silent Cry, 91.

²³⁸Heschel, God in Search of Man, 349.

²³⁹Rachel Carson, The Sense of Wonder (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 42-45.

One of the secrets of contemplative awareness, living, and caregiving is that although the pretheological attitudes like wonder, awe, and reverence are intrinsic to the human person who is created in the image and likeness of God, they can and must be cultivated, developed, cared for, and rediscovered again and again otherwise they come forth stillborn or emerge but soon atrophy and disappear. Like gratefulness which Heschel says “makes the soul great,” so too the contemplative attitudes of simple presence, attentiveness, openness to surprise, reverent receptivity, existential humility, and radical amazement must be evoked and practiced until that which is a deliberate act becomes a spontaneous way of engaging in life and being in the world. Jean Stairs writes of the importance of adults recovering “the *wow* in life” so that they are able to support children who have a natural propensity for wonder. She states:

Wonder is spontaneous to the child, and it is important not to extinguish this emotional and affective capacity, but to emphasize it as a way of entering into what is real. We can entice our children to wonder so that it becomes a habit of their souls, nourishing their adult spirituality. By providing young children with experiences of wonder, we find that, rather than merely repeating spiritual language we have given them, they discover their own spontaneous and candid expressions of the soul.²⁴⁰

She continues:

Too often, by the time we reach adulthood, we have had the capacity for wonder drained from us. Life’s experiences, cynicism, and tribulations can temper our sense of amazement. We can lose our sense of surprise and are no longer astonished by anything. It is as if there is nothing we have not seen, and the posture of approaching something in the world as if for the very first time seems like an old piece of clothing that we threw away a long time ago. Wonder can be too easily squelched, and yet it is essential for linking our souls to the living God who is so amazing, so divine. The whole point of enticing children to wonder is to enable them to develop a relationship with God, who can be known, yet is always full of surprises.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰Stairs, Listening for the Soul, 176.

²⁴¹Ibid.

It is never too early or too late to begin cultivating radical amazement. Pastoral caregivers who have cultivated a sense of wonder in their own lives can genuinely model for others, be they young children, teenagers, or adults, this radical response to life. This is worth far more than talking about it. Many years ago I stayed for three or four days at the home of a famous spiritual teacher and guide. It was a memorable visit complete with meaningful conversations, good meals, shared contemplative prayer, a march in solidarity with those suffering from HIV/AIDS, and a visit to a local holy site. But to this day what I remember most from that visit is how two or three times when this man was showing me the local countryside how he would stop, look intently, and say, "That's so fine!"

To maintain that there are ways and means, spiritual exercises or forms that help persons to wake up, stay aware, and be appreciative does not mean that mystical consciousness and contemplative engagement are reducible to a program or curriculum. Yet because mysticism is also not magical, all our care, all our liturgy, all our preaching, all our formation, and all our ministries should be rooted in and oriented toward wonder-filled and awe-based principles, presence, and living.²⁴² Contemplative practices are deliberate movements intended to foster spontaneous responses to life. No, we cannot make the sun rise, but we can and must do what is necessary to be awake when it begins to rise. Soelle writes of ways to stay awake to the amazement:

Whatever the badly misused word "meditation" means, it embraces a form of stopping and tarrying wherein individual or communities intentionally set aside for themselves times and places other than the ordinary ones. Listening, being still, at rest, contemplating, and praying are all there to

²⁴²Contemplative preaching might begin with the question: "Can this homily/sermon be converted to prayer?" Heschel urges: "Preach in order to pray. Preach in order to inspire others to pray. The test of a true sermon is that it can be converted to prayer. Heschel, Quest for God, 80.

make room for amazement. "Hear this, O Job, stop and consider the wondrous works of God." (Job 37:14)²⁴³

Wonder is how contemplative humans and caregivers make room for amazement.

To meet the world in expediency is to accumulate information in order to dominate; to encounter the world in wonder is to deepen one's appreciation in order to respond.²⁴⁴

Although there is no specific, programmatic mystical-prophetic syllabus, a mystical-prophetic pastoral plan of action involves whatever assists people going out to meet the world in wonder. It includes whatever evokes wonder and supports the movement from radical amazement through gratefulness and faith to human sympathy and compassionate action. Jean Stairs recommends three "enticements" by which caregivers can invite children, in particular, to soulful living: engaging ritual, opportunities for wonder, and times of prayer that include praise, recollection, and silence.²⁴⁵ In her book, The Silent Cry, before going on to describe mysticism as resistance, Soelle lists and explains how nature, eroticism, suffering, community, and joy are "places of mystical experience."²⁴⁶ Among other disciplines or rules for living, Matthew Fox emphasizes the importance of creativity as a way of responding to life and living responsibly insisting that creativity increases the amount of awe that is in the universe.²⁴⁷ Pastoral counselors and spiritual

²⁴³Soelle, Silent Cry, 91.

²⁴⁴Heschel, God in Search of Man, 350.

²⁴⁵Stairs, Listening for the Soul, 171-72.

²⁴⁶Soelle, Silent Cry, 97-187. Although the word "eroticism," especially in American culture, conjures up a variety of images, many unfavorable or unhealthy, Soelle chooses the word it over either love or sexuality saying, "Love is an ambiguous word and sexuality too technical a term for this place of mystical experience." 113.

²⁴⁷Fox, Creation Spirituality, 47, 91.

directors in particular would do well to encourage if not assign clients and directees respectively to develop and practice wonder and creativity.

Given that a mystical-prophetic life is a spirituality of sacred sensuousness, that is, largely experienced and lived in and through the human body and senses, spiritual preparation to receive and respond to wonder often involves prompting one of the five senses. Any sense will do, but let's take sight as an example and consider what occurs in contemplative seeing. Even though it is impossible to concoct or schematize mystical experience, allow me to suggest the features of contemplative awareness (seeing) that tend to be within the human persons' control, that suggest an inner movement within the viewer, and therefore that mystical caregivers can foster and support. This inner movement is presented not so much as a contrived strategy or as a literal and linear programmed sequence of moves but as an example of mystical consciousness which is by nature interactional. The features tend to be present whether the object we perceive is pleasing or difficult to look at.

A. (*Seeing something simple or beautiful*) B. (*Seeing something troubling or horrific*)

Look.	Look.
Notice.	Notice.
Be Open (or Susceptible). ²⁴⁸	Be Open (or Susceptible)
Behold.	Behold.
Appreciate.	Appreciate. ²⁴⁹
Be Moved (to thanks, praise, ____)	Be Moved (to sadness, anger, ____)
Be With.	Be Sympathetic.
Act Accordingly.	Act Accordingly. ²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸To be open or susceptible means that persons allow that which they see to "act on" and affect them.

²⁴⁹In Example A, appreciate refers to the first movement toward gratitude. In Example B, appreciate means to be fully aware or conscious of something, for example, the gravity or magnitude of a situation and implies moral observation, discernment, or an expression of criticism.

²⁵⁰Act accordingly not only means according to that which is before one, whether awesome or awful, but also according to the principles of a mystical-prophetic theology which include, for example, the

The poet, Mary Oliver writes, "If you notice anything,/ it leads you to notice/ more/ and more" while the poet, essayist, and naturalist, Dianne Ackerman, who does not believe in organized religion or a ruling God and identifies herself as an "earth ecstatic" nonetheless writes, "There is a form of beholding that is a kind of prayer."²⁵¹ This noticing and beholding, this contemplative capacity and courage to take in and appreciate *what is*, both describes the approach or manner of mystical caregivers with others and names what they hope to evoke and encourage in others. It also suggests the relationship between contemplation and compassionate action, between mysticism and prophecy, since the person who truly sees and appreciates the wonderful is more likely to be the one who truly sees and appreciates the dreadful.²⁵² Whatever fosters real noticing; whatever invites us more deeply into life, whatever makes us linger longer, or truly taste and savor, whatever makes us breathe more deeply, smell more fully, touch more thoughtfully and feel more intensely, whatever helps us listen to the mystery of the world or oneself or another will enhance a sense of wonder and awe. This is the work of a mystically-oriented pastoral care.

When we consider a sense of wonder in relationship to specific acts of caregiving, there are two ways that it comes into play. First, mystical caregivers seek to embody and

human person as the image of God, the preciousness of all life, and the interconnectedness of all beings in the infinite love of God. Therefore, the wonder, joy, and sheer pleasure of seeing or immersing oneself in a river, would be positive motivation not to pollute or allow others to pollute it.

²⁵¹"Moths," in Mary Oliver, *New and Selected Poems*, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 132; and Diane Ackerman, "A Messenger of Wonder," in *Going on Faith: Writing as a Spiritual Quest*, William Zinster, ed., (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1999), 111.

²⁵²Soelle reminds: "... it is not enough to describe this amazement as an experience of bliss alone. Amazement also has its bleak side of terror and hopelessness that renders one mute. . . . Those who seek to leave behind the terrifying, sinister side of wonderment, the side that renders us dumb, take on, through rational superiority, the role of those who own the world. In my view, to be able to own and to be amazed are mutually exclusive. Soelle, *Silent Cry*, 90.

make real the contemplative vision of life by looking at and seeing the other as a sacred image of God, by seeing the evidence of an imperfect human being and yet marveling at the peculiar treasure in whose presence they sit. Contemplative caregivers aim to behold the other in light of how they experience being beheld in contemplation by God. They aim to behold the other in the spirit of Rabbi Heschel's words:

A human being has not only a body but also a face. . . A face is a message, a face speaks, often unbeknown to the person. Is not the human face a living mixture of mystery and meaning? We are all able to see it, and are all unable to describe it. Is it not a strange marvel that among so many hundreds of millions of faces, no two faces are alike? And that no face remains quite the same for more than an instant? The most exposed part of the body, the best known, it is the least describable, a synonym for an incarnation of uniqueness. Can we look at a face as if it were commonplace?²⁵³

My sense is that apart from suffering, only contemplation, understood both as the prayer of awareness and as a way of being, enables caregivers to hold others in nonjudgmental compassion and to see them as images of God and as cause for wonder no matter how manipulative, overbearing, or repellent they may be.

Second, as suggested above, another way that caregivers can enact care as an evocative and formative ministry in pastoral counseling or spiritual direction is by assisting others in being deliberate about noticing, looking for, and appreciating the wondrous in their lives. In their book, Jewish Spiritual Guidance, Carol Ochs and Kerry Olitzky suggest that Psalm 119 is an excellent summary of the fundamental principles of spiritual guidance. At the end of their book they examine each stanza of this acrostic poem in light of spiritual guidance. Pointing out that the seventeenth stanza contains several expressions of wonder, they write:

²⁵³Heschel, Who Is Man?, 38.

Our responsibility as spiritual guides is often simply to remind those who come to us about their past experiences of wonder. Sometimes we encourage them to observe something wondrous in the present—or we invite them to relate something they have experienced through their senses in the previous twenty-four hours. At first, they may draw a blank, but this is instructive. It allows them to see how rarely they are present to what is around them; they use their senses merely to navigate and not to take in the richness of God’s world. After a while, they will report that they really do have a growing sense of wonder.²⁵⁴

Soelle suggests that another reason why adults may not be able to readily access experiences of wonder is because amazement involves “leaving oneself” and “letting go” of “possessions” that have cut-off persons from the spirit of wonder. She claims, “The more we let go of our false desires and needs, the more we make room for amazement in day-to-day life.” She continues, “We need purification (*purgatio*), both in the coercive mechanisms of consumption and in the addictions of the everyday working world.”²⁵⁵ Making room for amazement represents an orientation to life that is contrary to the consumptive ethos of contemporary society. Thus for adults there is a sense in which the formative quality of the practice of amazement requires an “un-forming,” a “letting go” of that to which we are consciously or unconsciously so deeply attached or by which we are so commonly distracted. In either case, what is important is the caregiver’s ability to assist others in calling attention to their lives, to encourage them to look, notice, and behold life around them, and to invite or gently challenge others “to make room for amazement,” to let go and to risk being acted upon by a given reality however mundane or mysterious, awesome or awful. In this sense, pastoral care both requires responding to

²⁵⁴Carol Ochs and Kerry M. Olitzky, *Jewish Spiritual Guidance: Finding Our Way to God* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 196.

²⁵⁵Soelle, *Silent Cry*, 92.

the evocation of radical amazement in oneself and cultivating, nurturing, and supporting others in becoming people of wonder.

Exercise

According to Jewish tradition, a person is expected to recite one hundred blessings (or *berakhot*) each day. Observant Jews recite the *Amidah* three times a day, each time containing eighteen blessings. There are dozens of everyday occurrences that call for other *berakhot*.²⁵⁶ In light of this Jewish practice of “counting one’s blessings” from which I have borrowed, I have encouraged persons from time to time to practice uttering one hundred “oohs” and “aahs” a day. Perhaps not as formally hallowed, this practice is nonetheless spiritually enlivening and encourages people to be intentional about going out to meet the world in wonder, to receive and respond to the simple and sublime mystery of life with radical amazement. I have found this to be appealing and valuable to adults and children alike. The point isn’t to be legalistic about the count but rather to shake up people’s complacency by encouraging them to be on the look out for reasons to wonder, opportunities to “ooh!” and “aah!” Inevitably what happens is that people begin to notice the seemingly little or insignificant wonders that they have taken for granted. Below is an example of how a simple contemplative practice can keep wonder alive by practicing wonder.

²⁵⁶The *Amidah* (“standing”) also called the *Shemoneh Esrei* (“the eighteen”) is the central prayer of the Jewish liturgy that observant Jews recite each morning, afternoon, and evening.

One hundred oohs and aahs

This exercise is a simple way to practice awareness and to awaken appreciation for life. Heschel claims, "There is no concern for God in the absence of awe."²⁵⁷ Simply acknowledge upon waking (and simply waking is worth an "ooh" and an "aah") that this new day is a gift and remind yourself that you will be on the look out for and open to reasons to be radically amazed, to "ooh!" and "aah!" You may want to do this in the form of a prayer:

O God, this is the day that you have made,
I will rejoice and be glad in it.
I will "ooh!" and I will "aah!",
voicing my wonder and delight.

As you feel on your body the warm water from the shower, as you smell the coffee, see the morning's first light, drive to work, move through your day, eat lunch, do your work or play, gather with friends, etc., practice contemplative awareness, reverently receiving the goodness of life in the moment and responding with either a vocalized or mental "ooh!" or "aah!" An example of such a moment is recounted in a poem by Denise Levertov in memory of her friend who died suddenly: She writes:

And I will speak
not of her work, her words, her search
for a new pathway, her need

to heedfully walk and sing through dailiness
noticing stones and flowers,

but of the great encompassing *Aah!* She would utter,
entering slowly, completely, into the welcoming whirlpool.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 111.

²⁵⁸Denise Levertov, "In Memory: After a Friend's Sudden Death," in Claiming the Spirit Within: A Sourcebook of Women's Poetry, Marilyn Sewell, ed., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 241.

Depending on the time, place, or situation, whether you are alone or with others, depending upon what evokes your delight, wonder, or awe, you might want to experiment with how you express your prayerful response to life. Savoring a bite of cheesecake at lunch will call for a different “ooh!” than will the sight for the first time of the Aurora Borealis, just as slipping into a hot bathtub late at night when the kids are finally in bed will no doubt elicit a different sounding “aah!” than the sight of a sleeping newborn. You may want to reflect on what seems to evoke an “ooh!” as opposed to an “aah!” You may also find that you notice certain things evoke a differently intonated “ooh!” one that is a response to something that makes you sad or awakens tender mercy as opposed to marvel or delight.

Cultivating Gratefulness

We have established that, according to Heschel, religion and the religious impulse begin with a preconceptual sense of the divine hinted at in the ineffable and present in mystery, thus giving rise to wonder and awe. Yet Heschel insists that the will to wonder and the intention of awe, however noble and efficacious, are not enough. He states, “The sense of wonder, awe, and mystery is necessary, but not sufficient to find the way from wonder to worship, from willingness to realization, from awe to action.”²⁵⁹ Cultivating and living a contemplative life requires radical amazement but it is what persons do with this amazement that determines whether or not they will engage in an ongoing mystical lifestyle and whether or not that life will impel them to compassion and sympathetic action. If wonder is not simply intellectual curiosity but the first indication that something

²⁵⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 108.

is asked of humans, then “*Be grateful*” is the first answer to the question, “What do you do with your ultimate wonder?” and the second answer is like it: “*Practice gratitude.*”

“To live within the core,” as Heschel refers to authentic religious living, requires the ongoing posture and the intentional practice of gratitude. Unlike radical amazement which is variously the antecedent, impetus, and reaction of faith, gratefulness is a conscious response and full-fledged sign of faith. In an effort to help others recover “the ancient instinct for astonishment,” Ron Rolheiser recommends a concrete praxis:

... the first exercise we must do to restore our contemplative faculty to its full powers is to work at receiving everything—life, health, others around us, love, friendship, food, drink, sexuality, beauty—as gift. Becoming a more grateful person is the first, and the most important step that there is in overcoming the practical atheism that besets our everyday lives.²⁶⁰

In agreement with both Heschel and Merton, Rolheiser maintains that the original sin is “the failure to be properly receptive and grateful,” going so far as to call this primal presumption an act of rape, that is, “the act of taking and carrying off by force something that can only be received respectfully and gratefully as gift.”²⁶¹ Imbedded in the primordial story of Adam and Eve is the foundation of an entire contemplative morality and a revelation of the inception of a practical atheism. Rolheiser writes:

God tells Adam and Eve that they may *receive* life as gift, but they may never *take* life as if it were theirs by right. . . . [A]s long as you continue to receive and respect reality as gift it will continue to give you life and goodness. Conversely, as soon as you attempt actively to seize it, or when you take it as owed, life will decrease and there will be shame, loss of harmony, pain, death, and loss of proper connection with God.²⁶²

²⁶⁰Rolheiser, *Shattered Lantern*, 182.

²⁶¹*Ibid.*, 180, 181.

²⁶²*Ibid.*

For Rolheiser, like Heschel, the initial (and perhaps essential) difference between saintly living and practical atheism is that the former is characterized by never taking anything as owed but rather receiving all, gratefully, as gift. For Heschel, the pious person as opposed to the egocentric person is one who feels a sense of indebtedness, that is, a sense that nothing is owed them.

Rolheiser points out the paradoxical way of contemplative living, insisting that belief in the existence of God and the felt sense of God's presence is never to be found through theoretical speculation but only in and as a result of an exercise in contemplative living. He contends:

To the extent that we take life for granted we will never see the Giver behind the gift. Conversely, though, once we stop taking life for granted we will, soon enough, begin to feel it as granted to us by God.²⁶³

Again, Heschel stresses that cultivating the ingredients of being human lead to the experience of the holy and that conclusions of faith cannot be grasped by those who have not practiced the prerequisites of faith.

In the same spirit in which Heschel asserts that Judaism is a conscious way of living, Rolheiser emphasizes that, like all virtues, gratitude is a discipline and spiritual practice:

To become grateful and to remain so, it is necessary to practice the asceticism of joy. The greatest compliment that one can give to the giver of a gift is to thoroughly delight in the gift. We owe it to our creator to delight in gratitude, in the gift of life and creation.²⁶⁴

Commenting on the Hasidic mystical tradition in Judaism recovered in the eighteenth century by Rabbi Baal Shem, Heschel states something similar:

²⁶³Ibid., 182.

²⁶⁴Ibid.

God is not only the creator of earth and heaven. God is also the One 'who created delight and joy'. . . Even lowly merriment has its ultimate origin in holiness. The fire of evil can be better fought with flames of ecstasy than through fasting and mortifications. . . .A new prohibition was added [by Hasidism]: 'Thou shalt not be old.'"²⁶⁵

As an intentional contemplative practice, worldview, and way of engaging in life, gratefulness is the true indication of a person's recentering of subjectivity from oneself to God²⁶⁶ which elicits delight, praise, and joy and leads to faith.

By this time it should be apparent that the fruits of cultivating a life of contemplative engagement and the merits of enacting a mystical approach to care of others do not reside in their being based on anything especially innovative or remarkable. Rather, the integrity and effects of each and both together arise from the full, conscious, and active practice of these simple but sacred disciplines: paying attention, noticing, beholding, being susceptible, being moved, taking delight in, "oohing" and "aahing", being receptive, and being grateful. To great effect (in forming contemplative attitudes and habits), caregivers can encourage clients, parishioners, and directees alike to perform practices as simple as lighting a candle before going to bed and naming aloud one thing from the day for which the person is grateful or keeping a Gratitude Journal that consists of no more than one line per day stating something for which the person is thankful. At the end of the week or month, the person can take some time to sit with and prayerfully ponder the written lines—beginning or concluding the time by slowly reading aloud the litany of thanks. Also, the exercise, "One Hundred Oohs and Aahs" can be applied to

²⁶⁵Heschel, Earth Is the Lord's, 75, 76.

²⁶⁶Kaplan, Holiness in Words, 4.

gratitude instead of wonder. Simply look for things to be grateful for and say, "Thank you."

Cultivating Solitude, Stillness, and Silence

One of the signs that modern Western society is antagonistic toward a contemplative ethos and complicit in the formation of the non-contemplative personality is its "hostility to silence."²⁶⁷ Many faith communities in this present-day cultural milieu are likewise often oblivious to, lacking in, or unsupportive of a contemplative sensibility and orientation. One of the ways that a mystically-prophetic care can promote significant being and cultivate contemplative living is by calling for the recovery of solitude, stillness, and silence. Together these three form the necessary conditions for contemplative prayer and living. Solitude, stillness, and silence are like wooden Mexican dolls that fit inside each other. From a spiritual perspective, it is nearly impossible to speak of one without speaking about the other two. In the spiritual life, solitude engenders stillness and silence. Stillness enhances silence which enables looking and seeing, listening and hearing. As an expression of faith, solitude transforms loneliness to aloneness with God, stillness exposes restlessness and enhances insight, and silence quiets the mind and heart and enables prayer. Kindred spirits in fostering spiritual growth and maturity, they are interdependent and mutually supportive. All are essential for contemplative awareness and capable of generating transformation. Again, the attitudes that caregivers hope to evoke and help give form to in others are the same ones that the caregivers themselves must cultivate, practice, and develop.

²⁶⁷Leech, Spirituality and Pastoral Care, 19.

Solitude

In his book, The Way of the Heart, Henri Nouwen proposes that the Christian spirituality of the desert mothers and fathers who went to the barren regions of Egypt in the third and fourth centuries has important lessons to offer ministers besieged by the pressures of contemporary ministry.²⁶⁸ His words are also helpful for the people for whom caregivers are charged to care who are so often dealing with the pressures of harried and hurried lives. In addition to being that consummate place where humans discover the personal, extravagant love of God and one's own belovedness, Nouwen asserts that solitude also serves two other especially important purposes: first, it is the place where people learn to confront their compulsions, and second, it is the place where people learn compassion.

Without solitude, Nouwen maintains, caregivers run the risk of becoming nothing more than compulsive doers (or compulsive do-gooders) in a society plagued by the busyness, compulsiveness, and competitiveness it peddles and promotes. Heschel explains:

One must withdraw and be still in order to hear. Solitude is a necessary protest to the incursions and the false alarms of society's hysteria, a period of cure and recovery.²⁶⁹

The compulsions which caregivers and others face are the compulsions of the false self. The false self is the self which is fabricated by social compulsions, that is, by obsessive concern with how others perceive us. Thus, as was the case after Jesus' baptism by John when he was tempted by Satan in the desert, the three temptations with which caregivers

²⁶⁸Henri J.M. Nouwen, The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry (New York: Seabury Press, 1981).

²⁶⁹Heschel, Who Is Man?, 44.

must wrestle are the social compulsion to be relevant, to be spectacular, and to be powerful.²⁷⁰ In this sense, especially for caregivers seeking to cultivate a contemplative heart, solitude is no cozy vacation. It is more than privacy, more than a place to recharge one's emotional battery, even more than a place to regain some needed strength to face the daily struggles of life or ministry. Solitude is often the place of intense struggle, "the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born, the place where the emergence of the new man and the new woman occurs."²⁷¹ It is also potentially the place of "the great encounter" where transformation occurs, for the genuine struggle against the false self awakens persons to the fact that they cannot overcome their compulsions alone. Solitude dismantles persons' normal "scaffolding"—

no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing.²⁷²

---thereby confronting them with their powerlessness, their nothingness. Here the persevering mystic discovers the loving God who becomes the source of transformation and the substance of the new self. Ultimately, solitude, what Nouwen calls "the furnace in which this transformation takes place," is not merely the place where we are confronted with our own sinfulness but more so the place where we experience the mercy

²⁷⁰Nouwen, Way of the Heart, 25.

²⁷¹Ibid., 27. The late mythologist, Joseph Campbell uses another more pleasant image to describe the importance of solitude. When being interviewed by Bill Moyers, he was asked, "What does it mean to have a sacred place?" Campbell replied: "This is an absolute necessity for anybody today. You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day where you don't know what was in the newspapers that morning, you don't know who your friends are, you don't know what you owe anybody, you don't know what anybody owes to you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be. This is the place of creative incubation." As quoted in Wolf, Nurturing the Spirit, 61.

²⁷²Nouwen, Way of the Heart, 27.

of God.²⁷³ It is especially the felt sense of God's presence experienced as mercy that when embodied in the contemplative caregiver becomes the gift they bring to others.

If solitude is the furnace of transformation or the cocoon of creative incubation, then it is also the classroom for learning compassion. Since what the contemplative caregiver has to give to others is not an object, not a skill, not even help primarily, but the overflow of "their being-fulnesss," solitude is a necessity. Although an extreme example, Nouwen's words about St. Anthony, considered the "father of monks," hold an important truth for caregivers:

St. Anthony spent twenty years in isolation. When he left it he took his solitude with him and shared it with all who came to him. Those who saw him described him as balanced, gentle, and caring.²⁷⁴

The same can be said of St. John of the Cross, Mohandas Gandhi, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Philip Berrigan and others who throughout history turned their imprisonments into a solitude that generated spiritual growth and transformation. From the enforced quietude of his prison cell, Lutheran pastor and Nazi resister, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "It's as if in solitude, the soul develops organs of which we're hardly aware in everyday life."²⁷⁵ In the contemplative approach to pastoral care the "resources" the caregiver makes use of are less tools or skills external to oneself than they are qualities of the heart acquired or received in, for example, the classroom of solitude, stillness, and silence, and then made available to others. The experience of solitude moves from mere physical isolation to a

²⁷³Ibid., 20, 37

²⁷⁴Ibid., 32.

²⁷⁵Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Who Am I? Poetic Insights on Personal Identity (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 27.

quality of the heart so that for caregivers solitude becomes a sacred space into which persons can be invited.

Heschel is adamant about the intimate and dynamic connection between the apparent opposites, solitude and solidarity. He knows that in order *to be with*, contemplative caregivers and others must first learn *to be*. In order to be ready and able to give of oneself, caregivers must do the inner work of the self which requires solitude as a spiritual workshop. Understood spiritually, solitude is not escapism into asocial self-absorption but rather the deliberate choice to be alone in order to listen for the meaning of one's being, to distill the meaning of one's life which ideally is life in conscious relationship to creation, others, God, and one's truest self. Indeed, one of the common revelations of solitude is that existence is coexistence.²⁷⁶

Stillness

If solitude reveals the compulsions of the false self, stillness exposes the restlessness that Rolheiser claims is especially characteristic of our times. It is conceivable, if hypothetical, in our therapeutic culture, that if the therapists of the world prescribed to their clients only the practice of sitting alone quietly and perfectly still for twenty to thirty minutes of uninterrupted silence once in the morning and once before going to bed, that the mental and emotional well-being of the human race would markedly improve, to say nothing of its spiritual and social well-being.²⁷⁷ Prior to modern psychology and psychotherapy, Blaise Pascal made his famous diagnosis that most of the

²⁷⁶Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 45.

²⁷⁷Stairs lists the benefits of contemplation identified by modern research indicating it can help reduce heart rate, lower blood pressure, relax the muscles, improve motor skills, impact insomnia, listlessness, and frenzy. Stairs, *Listening for the Soul*, 40. See also her footnote 4 on page 205.

evils of life arise from a person's inability to sit still in a room. The unique contemporary expression of this is seen in people whose lives are full but who themselves feel unfulfilled. So often, busyness masks the boredom that is the symptom of a sense of meaninglessness. Ultimately, restlessness is about meaning and stillness invites or forces people to look at the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of their lives.

Contemplation is a matter of seeing, of true perception. For people who are literally and figuratively on the move, the world and life are a blur. Intentional stillness brings about a clarity of vision, whether as sight or as insight. Stopping and being still enables persons to see what is all around them or right in front of them waiting not only to be seen but to be beheld. As an aid to sight, stillness helps us to see the familiar as if for the first time, with a new sense of appreciation, whether we are looking at an elderly parent, an almond tree in our backyard, or the same panhandler on the same corner each evening on the same drive home from work. As insight, stillness summons us to look more deeply at what all the movement means, what all the fidgetiness or all the running about is about. The opposite of significant being is meaningless being, and meaning is rarely apprehended apart from the deliberate solitude, stillness, and contemplative silence that gives rise to deep listening and personal reflection.

In one-to-one care, for example, in pastoral counseling or spiritual direction sessions, sitting still for a minute or two in silence at the beginning of their time together can be used effectively by pastoral caregivers, therapists, spiritual directors, and chaplains to settle down and shift one's own and the careseeker's energy to a still point from which the ensuing conversation can emerge.²⁷⁸ During the session itself, brief or

²⁷⁸Whereas caregivers will develop a "style" with favored practices, they should avoid becoming legalistically wed to this or any practice. One size does not fit all. They need to learn to read people as well

extended moments of quiet stillness can be an effective way of intentionally focusing on a particular incident recounted, feeling felt, question raised, emotion unstated or unconscious issue. Sometimes it is beneficial for the caregiver merely to observe the careseeker's talkativeness, agitated or excited speech. Other times simply making this observation to the careseeker can prove helpful and lead to valuable work. But there are also times during a pastoral encounter when a careseeker's speech signals a deeper sense of restlessness or lack of focus. In moments like this, the caregiver can gently invite the other to be still and silent for a moment: "John, let's stop for a second. Take some time just to be quiet. Maybe take a deep breath or close your eyes. See if you can listen to what's going on in you behind or beneath the words. When you're ready, see if you can say what you hear?" In this way, stillness may engender self-awareness and examination creating an opportunity for the words to come from a place of quiet deliberation or contemplative centeredness

Spiritually speaking, stillness is the condition for deep prayer. Physically, being still is the embodiment of a person's willingness or desire "just to be" and conveys one's consent to God. As prayer, stillness is the intersection between our vulnerability and God's mercy, between our dis-ease and God's faithful care, between our deepest yearning and God's true desire. The desire of God for us, as recorded by the psalmist, is "Be still and know that I am God." (Ps. 46:10) This divine directive succinctly signals the bias of a mystical care that seeks to invite and support intimacy with God and encourage transcendent living. The witness of mystics through the ages is that in and through silence and stillness, God is revealed as passionately present and unreservedly loving. In

as specific situations. If, for example, a regular client or familiar parishioner appears unusually agitated when he or she first comes in, you can either forgo the quiet time and begin by acknowledging that the person seems upset or by asking how they would like to begin.

addition, there is the attestation of the mystics that as they draw nearer to the mystery of God they draw closer to their own mystery as human beings as well. Thus, an essential task of mystically-oriented caregivers is to encourage and support others in the practice of stillness.

Silence

As an essential path of the mystical life and of mystical care, solitude and stillness are to the end of silence. In addition to the physical and mental benefits, silence is valuable for self-knowledge which is the first step to knowledge of God. Leech states:

If we are truly to know ourselves, to accept ourselves, without fear of the darkness and the turmoil within us, we need to cultivate the gift of silence. In silence and solitude, we can enter into ourselves, moving beyond the frenzy of endless activity, whether of body or of mind, which can stand in the way of any real encounter with our true selves.²⁷⁹

In the context of solitude and stillness, intentional silence provides the opportunity for the examination of one's life. It invites and allows persons to listen to their lives, the boredom and the pain of them no less than the excitement and gladness.²⁸⁰ Along these lines, Andrew Vogel Ettin explains how the Swiss Catholic philosopher, Max Picard, in his book The World of Silence, points out the devastating social and moral consequences of not making the silence to listen to oneself. Ettin writes:

Picard's silence (*Schweigen*, in his German original) seems more akin to mystical stillness. Silence, he believes, is the antidote to the noisy turmoil of disharmony and war distracting us from our spiritual focus, crowding out the inner space in which we would know our own mind rather than being subsumed into the collective swirl. Picard argues that it was not silent complicity but frenzied commotion that allowed Hitler's successes. Amid the bustle of modern, machine-age living, Picard suggests, it

²⁷⁹Leech, Spirituality and Pastoral Care, 20.

²⁸⁰Frederick Buechner, Now and Then (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1983), 87.

became harder for human beings to listen to themselves, their hearts, their thoughts, their consciences, their quiet but consistent communications from the divine and eternal. People could not often discern “the thin still voice” (1 King 19:12 *kol d’ mamah dakah*) or what rabbinic tradition elsewhere terms the *bat kol*, the “daughter of the voice” of God.²⁸¹

Heschel emphasizes that the quest for significant being is the quest for meaningful being not merely “for theoretical knowledge about myself.” Silence gives us the space to listen to our lives deeply enough to become aware of meaningful existence. He states:

Another discovery of a universal law in nature will not answer my problem. Nor is it simply a striving to extend the length of my life span into an afterlife.

What I look for is not how to gain a firm hold on myself and on life, but primarily how to live a life that would serve and evoke an eternal Amen. It is not simply a search for certitude (though that is implied in it), but for personal relevance, for a degree of compatibility; not an anchor of being but a direction of being.²⁸²

Contemplative silence enables the seeker both to discover and accept a personal life trajectory as well as to realize that meaning is not something that exists “out there” but in fact is revealed within the particularity and preciousness of one’s lived being. This is why to evade the truth of one’s life, whether painful or promising, is to forfeit meaning. At the same time the silence reveals that the meaning is not *my* life. Instead it discloses that “the self is in need of a meaning which it cannot furnish itself.”²⁸³

Another reason silence is important is because it makes the deep wordless and nonconceptual prayer of contemplation possible. In prayer, silence is the voluntary poverty that invites persons to let go of their agendas, hidden or otherwise, and to let God be God. In contemplative prayer, persons discover that silence is not the absence of God

²⁸¹ Andrew Vogel Ettin, Speaking Silences: Stillness and Voice in Modern Thought and Jewish Tradition (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 5.

²⁸² Heschel, Who Is Man?, 52-53.

²⁸³ Ibid., 56.

but the language of God. Contemplative silence is the necessary condition for deep listening, for we cannot use language we do not understand. By being silent in the loving presence of God, we begin to learn the language God speaks in prayer. Heschel states, "What the word can no longer yield, man achieves through the fullness of his powerlessness."²⁸⁴ True silence, silence of the heart, signals not merely the absence of speech or sound, but stillness, surrender, and absence of self-concern.²⁸⁵ Merton says that this interior silence is impossible without humility and mercy, and consequently is both an expression of human meekness and divine gratuity respectively.²⁸⁶ As the intentional turning of one's attention from the self to God, Heschel says silence represents the highest understanding, signals the highest praise, and hints at the holiness hidden within the pious man or woman. Merton insists this silence is life-giving, literally that it gives-us-our lives. He writes:

My life is a listening, [God's] is a speaking. My salvation is to hear and respond. For this, my life must be silent. Hence, my silence is my salvation.²⁸⁷

Merton maintains that the reason this silence is salvific is because it is where and how we discover our true identity, our original and eternal name. It is where we discover that our true identity resides not in our accomplishments or failures, not in our good or bad behavior, not in our family of origin or who we know or what we own, but rather in God alone. Merton states:

²⁸⁴Heschel, Quest for God, 39.

²⁸⁵Like Gandhi, Heschel admits there are those who use many words but are quiet on the inside and those who are silent on the outside but noisy on the inside. Heschel, Who Is Man?, 44.

²⁸⁶Merton, Thoughts in Solitude, 74.

²⁸⁷Ibid.

It is necessary to name Him Whose silence I share and worship, for in His silence He also speaks my own name. He alone knows my name, in which I also know His name. . . .

As soon as He speaks my name, my silence is the silence of infinite life, and I know that I *am* because my heart has opened to my Father in the echo of the eternal years.²⁸⁸

After cultivating this life-giving silence in their own lives, caregivers are granted the privilege and charged with the responsibility of inviting and helping others to make of their lives a holy listening and a sacred response by which they too will find life.

Implied and stated directly above, a final benefit of contemplative silence is that, along with the solitude and stillness that make it possible, silence is the taproot for the ministry of mystical caregivers. Leech writes:

Nothing is more necessary in pastoral care and in spiritual direction than an ability to listen, an ability which is nourished in contemplation, stillness and inner silence. More than any other pastoral gifts, people are looking for pastors who are possessed of interior quietude. It is not a skill that can be learnt, nor can one fake such a quality. It only comes as a by-product of a life in which silence and stillness have a major place.²⁸⁹

Sitting still before God, entering into silence as contemplative prayer, not only teaches the caregiver to let God be God but also enables them to allow others to whom they offer care to be themselves and not extensions of their rabbi, pastor, therapist, or spiritual director. Without a personal familiarity with interior silence attained through the regular spiritual practice of contemplative prayer, effective communication skills for caregivers remain merely external tools once-removed from the being of the caregiver. The important skills of active listening taught to and used by effective caregivers—gathering facts, eliciting elaboration, exploring feelings, paraphrasing, asking open-ended questions, encouraging discovery, offering empathy, clarifying meanings, noticing non-

²⁸⁸Ibid., 73, 74.

²⁸⁹Leech, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care*, 21.

verbal cues—are most effective and most genuine when integrated into a contemplative heart awakened in the silence of God.

There are several practical ways we can cultivate solitude, stillness, and silence as fundamental attitudes of contemplative living through individual and congregational practice of pastoral care. In order to do so, this must occur both at the level of actual pastoral care by caregivers and at the level of theological education, spiritual formation and direction programs where future ministers and caregivers are being prepared. First, faith leaders and communities must make it a priority to form communities of contemplatives-in-action where opportunities for solitude, stillness, and silence are provided and promoted. This means that churches and synagogues must be intentional about creating physical *spaces*, inside and outside, that is intended solely for silence and solitude. Prayer gardens and benches, meditation chapels and alcoves, portable or permanent labyrinths or paths for meditative walking, are some of the ways that the environment can evoke contemplative silence and convey to visitors or community members that prayer is important. The Carmelite monk, Father David Denny states:

Just as no one person can create a community, no one person can form another person as a contemplative (let alone have they the right). What they can do however, is strive to provide the *lively human atmosphere* in which worship and love may flourish.²⁹⁰

Second, faith communities need to set aside *time* for contemplative stillness and silence. Although this suggestion fits easier into the rhythm of more liturgical traditions, it is important to remember that silence is not a doctrinal, denominational, or partisan issue. Day care can be offered one day a week for at home moms or dads along with a

²⁹⁰David Denny, "Forming the Beams of Love: An Antidote to Individualism," *Desert Call*, 28, no. 4 (Winter 1993), 24.

sacred space that invites nourishing and healing silence.²⁹¹ Parishes can offer daily, weekly, or seasonal days for silent prayer and reflection. Local faith communities can regularly offer on-site or off-site retreats that are either silent or incorporate opportunities for silence and solitude. Leech insinuates that we need to be bolder about encouraging not “the three-hour mixture of quiet and chat, but the deep silence of three to four days, undertaken at least once a year.”²⁹² This, of course, is especially true for pastoral leaders and caregivers, but also for others who can carve out the time. In this day and age when the word “retreat” is being used to refer even to corporate getaways, it is striking though not surprising how little silence actually takes place or is intentionally built in to church retreats. Often those planning, orchestrating, and leading these retreats are themselves uncomfortable with silence or fail to understand its importance in the journey of faith.

Third, more time for silence and more timely silences need to be included in *worship*. As visual artists, poets, and musicians know, the “blank” space and the breath or pause is essential if the paint, words, and musical notes are to work their respective magic. The proclamation of scripture, for example, should be followed by a silence that is sincere and generous enough to invite the assembly to genuine reflection on the Word. Other ritual actions should be surrounded by enough silence that they can be truly evocative and fulfill their purpose.

Fourth, *spiritual formation* for adults *and* children must be designed with the intention of introducing people to contemplative silence and to support them in making it

²⁹¹Many churches, for example, are good about offering “programs” for moms with young children. However, it often is assumed that what is most needed or wanted is time to connect with other adults. Programs or opportunities that are contemplative in nature as well could be designed for tired, stay at home moms or dads with young ones. Similar opportunities can be organized for early evenings to accommodate and target busy workers and commuters. These evenings could include a simple supper, time for contemplative prayer, and perhaps informal socializing.

²⁹²Leech, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care*, 27.

an ongoing commitment and lifelong practice. The renowned scientist and educator, Maria Montessori, said, "Silence often brings us the knowledge which we had not fully realized, that we possess within ourselves an interior life. The child by means of silence sometimes becomes aware of this for the first time."²⁹³ What better and more appropriate place for children to learn silence than in the faith community. The only more fitting place is at home where silence can be incorporated into bedtime rituals, meal blessings, family gatherings, and seasonal celebrations. The use of darkness, a lighted candle, a special religious symbol in a special corner of a room can help consecrate this time of silence.

Finally, seminaries, spiritual direction programs, and theology schools preparing and *training persons for pastoral ministry* must be committed to offer similar opportunities as mentioned above within their academic curriculum and campus ministries. Heschel writes, "Theological education must deepen privacy, strive for daily renewal of innerness, cultivate ingredients of religious existence, *reverence* and *responsibility*."²⁹⁴ Writing from the Anglican tradition, Leech comments about this:

It is, on a purely practical level, in the interests of future generations of Christian disciples, to help produce as pastors men and women of spiritual depth and insight. This means that we need to be exposing people at an early stage to the insecurity and wildness of the desert, to the journey beyond certainty which the dark night symbolizes. The pastoral task demands persons who have entered deeply into their own hearts, who have explored the wastes of their own inner desert, who have faced their own central darkness. No amount of charm, study or fluency in communication can substitute for this battle for the heart.²⁹⁵

²⁹³Quoted in Wolf, Nurturing the Spirit, 59.

²⁹⁴Heschel, "On Prayer," in S. Heschel, ed. Moral Grandeur, 264.

²⁹⁵Leech, Spirituality and Pastoral Care, 28.

Caregivers can become intimately conversant with personality theories, master therapeutic strategies and techniques, but if they have not done their own “heart work,” if they have not known solitude where they can confront their compulsions, if they have never practiced intentional stillness where they can trace the source of their restlessness and let God be God, or if they have not entered into regular prayerful silence where they can discover the love of God as well as their own belovedness and their own duplicity, it is improbable that they will become substantive pastoral leaders or engaged caregivers of compassion and depth.

Let us turn now to a consideration of pastoral care from a prophetic perspective.

CHAPTER 8

A PROPHETIC APPROACH TO PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND CARE

Preamble

Within Judaism, especially as accentuated in Heschel's work, is the judgment that authentic piety and full human living requires not only attention to radical amazement but also to compassionate action. Additionally, both commitments must be expressed in the personal and the social dimensions of existence. Heschel's writings directly and indirectly encourage us to include in our conception and practice of care, attention to the compassionate, justice-oriented, and liberating dimension of care on the communal, societal, environmental, and even cosmic levels of human existence, what I call the Prophetic or *sympathetic-transformational* expression of care. In addition to the mystical approach to care, this prophetic orientation, with its attention to human, societal, and cosmic brokenness, *tikkun ha olam*, and the social and cosmic implications ascribed to *mitzvot*, offers a much needed challenge to "the psychology of adjustment" that has wielded a major influence in Protestant pastoral care since the 1930's as well as to the Roman Catholic tendency before Vatican II to confine the responsibility and context of pastoral care to the priest and the parish respectively.¹

The prophetic expression of care also confronts the persistent tendency (primarily in Protestant circles) to equate pastoral care with pastoral counseling, and more so, for

¹Gerkin, Introduction, 60, 63-64.

pastoral counseling to become, for all intents and purposes, the exclusive province of white, upper-middle class persons.² Pastoral theologian Charles Gerkin writes:

Unfortunately, as pastoral counseling has become increasingly specialized under the influence of psychotherapy, more and more of its recipients come not from the margins of society, but from the affluent middle and upper classes. Pastoral counseling has increasingly become counseling only for those who can afford it!³

An understanding and practice of pastoral care that calls itself prophetic and takes its lead from the Jewish prophets, who as Heschel notes again and again, on the human level are passionately concerned about the forgotten and neglected—the orphan, the widow, and the stranger—necessarily is concerned about and oriented toward those most vulnerable and marginalized by society.⁴ As a proponent of an approach to pastoral theology and care (and counseling is one important dimension of pastoral care), that seeks to reemphasize the prophetic, I agree with Gerkin who writes:

So it is that, as the discipline of pastoral care moves into the future, it must renew or recover its earlier sense of mission to those whose needs are great while their ability to seek out the care they need is small. We must find new ways to make care available to all people and not simply to those who are affluent and sufficiently psychologically sophisticated to show up at the pastoral counselor's office. This may mean finding ways to bring

²Ibid., 63. It is my opinion that the reason the Catholic Church did not succumb to the temptation to reduce pastoral care to pastoral counseling, especially as it made use of the behavioral and social sciences, is due primarily to its defensive posture toward modernity and its tendency prior to Vatican II to rely primarily on the sacramental life of the church to address "pastoral problems." In other words, its ability to sidestep this mistaken practice was more accidental than intentional. For a survey of Roman Catholic Pastoral Theology see R. L. Kinast, "Pastoral Theology, Roman Catholic," in Rodney J. Hunter, gen. ed., Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1990), 873-74.

³Ibid., 98.

⁴Kinast, "Pastoral Theology," 874. Regarding the tendency for care to be reduced to individual counseling and counseling to become the privilege primarily of affluent Caucasians, thus excluding the marginalized, after Vatican II, especially as expressed in Latin American liberation theology, certain Catholic and Protestant persons and communities recovered the commitment to social transformation as the first indispensable step toward an effective and integral pastoral care. Even so, it is fair to say that its theory (rooted in social analysis) has been threatening, in Roman Catholic circles, to the papal hierarchy and magisterium, and its implications for practice have been threatening to many Protestant and Catholic laity and communities.

care to these marginal persons other than counseling in the strictly psychotherapeutic sense.⁵

This needs to be stated even stronger. An understanding and practice of pastoral care that is intensely and intentionally prophetic *must* find ways to bring care to those most marginalized. The biblical command of compassion and justice, whether announced in the Hebrew scriptures for Jews and embodied by the priests and prophets, or in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures for Christians and embodied by the life and teachings of Jesus, require that the setting and situation of care become deliberately and generously inclusive. As Gerkin insinuates, that compassion towards the most vulnerable and justice for the most neglected in society is a dominant concern in both Jewish and Christian scriptures and communities indicates that a call for a prophetic expression of care is, in fact, not new but rather a recovery and reinterpretation of an ancient mission.

A Prophetic Approach to Pastoral Care

As a complement to the previous chapter, the purpose of this chapter is to lay out the spiritual roots, theological rationale, pastoral aim and enactment of a prophetic approach to pastoral care and to illuminate its unique and requisite contributions. Following this I will offer some final comments on the intersection of the mystical and prophetic way as pastoral theology and care serve to cultivate, nourish, and support significant being.

With the inclusion of other voices and experiences besides those of white, Euro-American, male Protestants, pastoral theology and care have benefited from the more recent critiques of previously unchallenged operative images and expressions of care as well as from the bevy of inventive images that continue to emerge. However helpful, no

⁵Gerkin, Introduction, 89-90.

one image will do. No one image is adequate to convey the complexity and multifacetedness of pastoral care nor does every aspect of a chosen image illuminate or pertain to care.⁶ Images work, and don't work, apply and don't apply. Like the mystics who were intimately aware of the fathomless mystery of God and who created more not fewer images of the divine and metaphors for their relationship with the divine, we need to listen and look for "the signs of the times," recovering and reworking old images while continuing to discover creative and helpful ways of imagining and understanding the identity of caregivers and the practice of the care of souls.

A mystical-prophetic approach to pastoral care brings into play two untapped and perhaps seemingly unlikely images: the mystic and the prophet.⁷ As we have seen, the mystic is no navel-gazing, ungrounded eremite but rather a lover of God and life who is fully awake, truly alive, deeply appreciative, and wholeheartedly present and responsive to all reality. As such, the mystical caregiver offers the way of contemplative engagement as another vital image by which ministers and caregivers can consider and compare their own self-understanding and practice of care, guidance, and counseling.

The prophet, too, provides a view and a way of life that can benefit those persons charged with and committed to caring for others. Frequently left out of or contrasted to the ministry of pastoral care in pastoral theological writings, the prophetic view, understanding, and expression of faith is also an essential and necessary component of a holistic pastoral theology and an integral part of the practice of care. Whereas mystical

⁶Robert C. Dykstra, Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings (St. Louis, MO.: Chalice Press, 2005). Dykstra compiles writings on various metaphors of care that have been presented throughout the history of pastoral care.

⁷Neither the image of the mystic nor of the prophet appears among the many pastoral images of care treated in Robert Dykstra's recent book, Images of Pastoral Care.

consciousness and the contemplative way is primarily a response to the gratuitous character of God's love, the prophetic consciousness and sympathetic way are mainly a response to the demands this love makes.⁸ Each in their own way feel deeply and respond wholeheartedly to the passionate and compassionate presence of God: the mystic with characteristic openness and radical amazement; the prophet with emblematic sympathy and concern for justice.

Just as a mystical approach to care is not intended to be nor reducible to a tactical how-to guide for ministers and caregivers, so also a prophetic approach is meant more as an evocative and provocative metaphor of care. In Images of Pastoral Care, a compilation of classic and contemporary texts, Editor Robert Dykstra suggests that the metaphors included in the book serve more "as works of art intent on inspiring ministry in more indirect and subtle ways."⁹ He writes:

Like the evocative power of images in portraits, sculptures, films, or poetry, these pastoral images serve not so much to inform specific tasks of ministry, but to foster a richer sense of pastoral self-understanding, identity, and integrity.¹⁰

I agree with Dykstra's assessment of the essential value and purpose of pastoral images for caregivers. Moreover, his reference to the artistic nuance inherent in these images and the evocative nature and open-ended power such images hold for caregivers is well taken. However, I believe that in addition to enlightening pastoral identity, the mystical and prophetic images of care (as well as the images presented in his book) do, in fact, inform specific tasks of ministry, as well they inform the method, just not in a simplistically

⁸Gustavo Gutierrez, On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 95.

⁹Dykstra, Images of Pastoral Care, 12.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 12-13.

precise, formulaic, care-by-numbers manner. All effective images of care inform and illuminate, but they do so more by alluding to, insinuating, and suggesting, than by telling, indoctrinating, or prescribing.

Let us turn our attention now to the prophet as a provocative image of pastoral care, examining the main features of the prophetic consciousness and way of life and the contributions a prophetic approach makes to our understanding and ministry of care.

The Way of the Prophet

The prophetic life is life lived fully awake to the presence and love of God which the prophet experiences most poignantly as divine pathos,¹¹ that is, as living care, as God's intentional participation and personal involvement in history. For the prophet, God is not the Remote, Wholly Other but the God of the covenant who loves, is near, accessible, known to, and concerned about the predicament of humankind. For the prophet, pathos expresses the divine relatedness that bridges the gulf between God and humanity. Pathos is God's responsiveness to the human situation, not the cause of it. Like the mystic, the prophet knows God by experience, by living together with God, not by analysis or induction. For the prophet, God is not only intimately and personally concerned about but also moved and affected by what happens to the world and to humanity. As stated earlier, God is not the unmoved mover of the Aristotelian tradition, but *the most moved mover* of the Torah as exemplified in this poignant conversation with Moses, captured especially in the illustrative verbs:

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the

¹¹Ultimately, pathos refers to the love of God, but as mentioned earlier, this love may be expressed as sorrow, disappointment, and anger as well as benevolence, affection, and pleasure.

Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey; . . . The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh, to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.

(Exodus 3:7-12)

The prophets feel deep in their bones the fullness and the depth of God’s care for all creation and all humanity and interpret it as a summons and a challenge. If the mystic is acutely aware of humanity being an image of God, then the prophet is especially aware of humanity being a perpetual concern of God. Even more, prophets are gripped by the realization that they are called to be the partner or consort of God, and are charged with the responsibility of conveying to others the divine will and pathos.

Since divine pathos is the dynamic modality that makes the God-human encounter possible, and because divine pathos is the focal point of prophetic consciousness, sympathy and reciprocity describe the manner in which the prophets respond to the summons and the demands of covenantal existence. Whereas pathos characterizes the life of God, sympathy characterizes the life of the prophet. Just as God’s pathos is a free and deliberate response to the human situation, not a matter of a fixed encoded divine essence, so too prophetic sympathy is an act of human willingness.

To be a witness of the pathos of God, to bear testimony to God’s concern for human beings, which is the prophet’s task, is to convey and embody a divine point of view of human existence. While proclaiming that God’s pathos is compassion, for compassion is the root of God’s relationship to humankind, prophets also try to move

people to repent and facilitate the reconciliation between the community and God.¹² Even though prophets are concerned about right and wrong, their souls are extremely sensitive to human suffering.¹³ In reality, the prophets live in tension, feeling both sympathy for God and compassion for the people, charged with the unique task of exposing people to their indifference, reminding them of their resistance to God, while reminding God of God's deepest concern and love for God's people. Thus, anguish, as Brueggemann points out, not anger, is the characteristic idiom of their criticism.

The prophet's task is to rouse people and communities from their complacency, to challenge their cherished certainties and self-deception, to disturb their private idolatries, to confront their callousness, to wake them not only to the promises but to the demands of God and life, to intensify responsibility, to encourage *teshuvah* and instigate change, to penetrate numbness and anguish with grief and mourning, to engender an alternative consciousness, to energize a new attitude of care, and to keep imagination and hope alive. The prophet, and thus the prophetic caregiver, is committed to a vision and a life that is marked by holy realism, recognizing and resisting false images of the world, life, and oneself. Thus, two of the salient attitudes of prophetic faith are gratitude and contrition since prophets live with the confidence that life is good in spite of evil and that life is evil in spite of good.¹⁴ Finally, the prophets try to illuminate the people and lead them to service of God by invoking righteousness (*tsedakah*), evoking kindness (*hesed*), and provoking justice (*mishpat*).

¹²Ibid., 403.

¹³Ibid., 152.

¹⁴Heschel, "Confusion of Good and Evil," in S. Heschel, ed. *Moral Grandeur*, 30. Prophetic care celebrates wholeness when it is found, accepts and supports brokenness when it appears, and especially articulates, invites, encourages, and supports holiness.

Sympathetic-Transformational Care

A main contention of this dissertation is that pastoral care has lacked a concept of care that reveals it as an evocative ministry and task. Pastoral care, in other words, is not merely palliative and compassionate but creative and formative as well. Just as glaring has been the strict demarcation between the pastoral and the prophetic. Along with the call for an evocative and formational understanding and practice of care offered by the mystical approach, Heschel's work requires that equal attention be given to the prophetic nature of care, highlighting the sympathetic and transformational expressions of care that derive from prophetic experience.¹⁵ As we just saw above, there are a number of important characteristics that distinguish the prophet's consciousness, personality, commitment, and actions. For the purpose of moving toward a holistic, integral pastoral care, I will focus on two features essential to the prophet's consciousness and way of life—sympathy and transformation—suggesting how each relates to the theology and practice of care.

It may seem a truism to state that sympathy is fundamental to the ministry of care for certainly the word care, even in its most unadorned form without an adjective, seems to conjure up images that insinuate that there is some emotional content involved in the

¹⁵ Another reason for the strict demarcation between the pastoral and the prophetic is because for many years pastoral theology, care, and counseling gave a disproportionate amount of attention to counseling. More recently we are recovering the sense that care is not defined nor exhausted by counseling. As a Catholic, I view pastoral care from within the classic tradition of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. When we do so we see that counseling is not the sum total of care but rather one important expression of it. The spiritual works of mercy are: to admonish sinners, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead. The corporal works of mercy are: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to visit and ransom the captives, to shelter the homeless, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead. Just as new "mysteries" have been added to the Catholic devotion of the Rosary, and new images have been added to pastoral care, so too our understanding of the works of mercy have led to the need for similar works of peace and justice.

act of reaching out to another. Of the four terms chosen in this work to describe the need for and the nature of a mystical-prophetic approach to care—evocative, formational, sympathetic, and transformational—the one most familiar to (and until recently, perhaps most favored by) pastoral theologians and practitioners of care is *sympathetic*. Indeed, the two images that arguably have dominated the field the past forty plus years—shepherd and wounded healer—attest to this claim. Both are images that closely associate the idea and practice of care with sympathy. To these images I add that of the prophet who provides us a unique, valuable, and alternative angle by which to see and understand care as a ministry of sympathy. Sympathy represents not only the inner impetus for pastoral care but also the core reality that defines the very nature and practice of it. Before considering the attitude and action of prophetic sympathy, let me first make a few comments about the transformational nature of pastoral care.

In order for the theory and practice of pastoral care to be truly holistic, the prophetic approach insists that pastoral care be concerned about transformation as well as sympathy-in-action. If sympathetic care implies a compassionate response of presence evoked by a person who is suffering or by a situation of need, then transformative care implies a commitment to change the circumstances and structures that cause or allow for unnecessary misfortune or tribulation to occur or continue. Such care not only instigates transformation but also encourages and supports its continuation. This is true whether caring for individuals, communities, or the cosmos.

Literally, transformation means “a change of form.” When applied to pastoral theology and care, as is true in other cases, the word can be used to refer to many different kinds of change. Within Jewish history, tradition, belief, and way of life,

especially as informed by and expressed in its prophetic and mystical heritage, transformation relates especially to three areas of existence: the personal, the social-historical (which includes the communal), and the cosmic. Heschel alludes to this tripartite approach to life when he claims, “The purpose of prophecy is to conquer callousness, to change the inner man as well as to revolutionize history.”¹⁶ These intentions presume and are similar to the desire of God as recorded in Micah 6:8: “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” The syntax of Heschel’s statement emphasizes the need for transformation or change. Thus we see that the fundamental aspirations of the prophetic life revolve around cultivating and sustaining compassion, ongoing conversion, and the transformation of history through the work of restorative justice which prepares the way for ultimate redemption. Furthermore, informed by the biblical, mystical, and rabbinic wisdom of Judaism, Heschel understands and argues for the intimate connection and mutual relationship between the various types of transformation and in so doing not only lays out for people and communities of faith a pattern of living but also makes clear the essential task and purpose of *cura animarum*: *tikkun ha nephesh* and *tikkun ha olam*. So too does Jesus when in response to the question, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” (Matthew 22: 36) answers by quoting the great commandments recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (“love the Lord your God with your whole heart . . .”) and Leviticus 19:18 (“love your neighbor as yourself”).

The prophets are personally and particularly invested in promoting this three-fold transformation because they are preoccupied with what concerns God. Foremost among

¹⁶Heschel, *Prophets*, 20.

God's concerns are two fundamental realities: justice (*mishpat*) and righteousness (*tsedakah*).¹⁷ Heschel states:

There are few thoughts as deeply ingrained in the mind of biblical man as the thought of God's justice and righteousness. It is not an inference, but an *a priori* of biblical faith, self-evident; not an added attribute to His essence, but given with the very thought of God. It is inherent in His essence and identified with His ways.¹⁸

Heschel claims the two are so inextricably connected that it is "exceedingly difficult to establish the exact difference in meaning of the biblical terms."¹⁹ He suggests that justice refers to something we do, a mode of action. Righteousness refers to a quality of the person, the way we are.²⁰ Illuminating these terms further, he points out that the nouns derived from each word, *shofet* and *tsaddik* respectively, mean judge or arbitrator in the first case, and holy person in the second instance. Heschel contends *mishpat* is strict, straightforward, giving each person his or her due, while *tsedakah* implies kindness, benevolence, and generosity. Whereas justice connotes legality, righteousness "is associated with a burning compassion for the oppressed."²¹ Most basically, by justice is meant "the active process of remedying or preventing what should arouse the sense of injustice."²² Righteousness means living like God or in agreement with the heart of

¹⁷*Tsedakah* is frequently translated into English as "charity." It should be noted, however, that the Hebrew word, *tsedakah* carries a sense of obligation based on what is right or just given that God is the source of all things and each person is an image of God, *tselem elohim*. Thus, *tsedakah*, unlike philanthropy, is not meant to be determined by one's financial means, emotional feelings, or willingness to give.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 256.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*, 260.

God.²³ Heschel insists that the truth of each cannot be fully appreciated apart from the other. He writes:

Justice dies when dehumanized, no matter how exactly it may be exercised. Justice dies when deified, for beyond all justice is God's compassion. The logic of justice may seem impersonal, yet the concern for justice is an act of love.

Finally, he asserts that in actual living they form one substantive reality and one integral way of being which can be called the way of God. Biblical justice, Heschel maintains, must always reflect the essence and ethos of righteousness. He writes:

It would be wrong to assume that there was a dichotomy of *mishpat* and kindness; "Justice was not equal justice but a bias in favor of the poor. Justice always leaned toward mercy for the widows and the orphans." Divine justice involves His being merciful, compassionate.²⁴

In addition to compassion or to loving kindness (*hesed*), it is the conscious embodiment of these expressions of faith—walking humbly with God and doing justice—that especially integrate the personal, social, and universal in a pattern of passionate and pious living. It is God's concern for justice and righteousness (or holiness) as revealed to and received by the prophets that likewise motivate and guide prophetic caregivers, move them beyond any narrow or exclusive idea of care as tender solicitousness, and orients them toward transformation of persons, communities, the social order, and the cosmos.

Informed and guided by the prophet who is most concerned about holiness and justice, a mystical-prophetic approach to care is one that is committed to fostering and supporting personal and social transformation not merely formation, one that is

²³ Again, for Heschel the heart (will or dream) of God is especially revealed and learned in and through the act of worship, the study of the Word of God, and good deeds.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 257.

committed not simply to psychological growth but to “conversion of the inner [person]” (or *tikkun ha nephesh* in Jewish spirituality) and conversion of the world into the dream of God (*tikkun ha olam*). Writing from the Christian perspective, former dean and president of General Theological Seminary in New York, the Episcopalian priest, James Fenhagen states:

The Christian life involves more than growth and development. It involves conversion and transformation, a radical turning of the Self toward God who made us and who continues to sustain us. Christian faith is about an inner transformation of consciousness resulting from our encounter with the living Christ. . . . The fruit of conversion is a life that can be used by God for the healing of the world.²⁵

Earlier he states:

Christianity is not a religion that sees the human journey primarily in terms of growth (which implies natural unfolding), but in terms of transformation (which implies a radical restructuring of the center of our being).²⁶

Whether we call it *metanoia* (conversion) or *teshuvah* (turning), authentic spiritual living involves not only gradual growth and ongoing development but also a radical alteration of vision, and an equally radical shift of consciousness and way of living. So does an integral pastoral care.

From the Jewish point of view Heschel speaks of the orientation toward and commitment to transformation. He maintains, in addition to increasing one's God-consciousness, the purpose of inner transformation is to unite being and doing. He states:

It is a distortion to say that Judaism consists exclusively of performing ritual or moral deeds, and to forget that the goal of all performing is in *transforming* the soul. Even before Israel was told in the Ten

11. ²⁵James C. Fenhagen, *Invitation to Holiness* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 10-

²⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

Commandments what *to do* it was told what *to be: a holy people*. . . .The goal is not that a ceremony be *performed*, the goal is that man be *transformed*, to worship the Holy in order to be holy.²⁷

He continues by emphasizing that the point of performing deeds of holiness is “to absorb the holiness of deeds” and thereby to experience sanctity and integrity by discovering how to be one with what we do.²⁸ According to Heschel, for the Jew, transformation is signaled by becoming an incarnation of the Torah and by mirroring God. For Christians, transformation is signaled by embodying the truth of St. Paul’s words, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). For devout Jews, transformation is *the result of* a faithful, pious, and holy life. For devout Christians, transformation (in Christ) is *the impetus for* a faithful, pious, and holy life. Although understood differently, Heschel agrees with Fenhagen that the fruit of inner transformation (*tikkun ha nephesh*) is that it generates cosmic transformation (*tikkun ha olam*).

Just as central to Heschel’s vision as his insistence that we become holy by acting holy or keep alive the sense of wonder through deeds of wonder is his assertion that we keep alive the sense of compassion (and thereby prevent indifference and ward off callousness) by deeds of compassion and sustain justice (and resist evil) by doing justice. Sacred deeds, acts of wonder, compassionate and just actions have the capacity not merely to form but to transform both the givers and the receivers of care, variously changing one’s self-understanding, world-view, God-consciousness, awareness of reality, and *raison d’être* by altering one’s frame of reference.

Just as for the devout Jew, the committed Christian, and the faith-based community, so too for pastoral caregivers the issue in their own lives is openness to

²⁷Heschel, God in Search of Man, 310-11.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 310.

transformation, and in their ministry, commitment to fostering it in other persons, communities, and the world. To claim that authentic spirituality must be concerned with justice and righteousness signals that a mystical-prophetic care must be concerned about transformation since the world is pocked with injustice and the human person as yet has not truly learned or has forgotten what it means to be human.

In addition, such a claim means more than caregivers being aware of the contextual nature of pastoral care. It means that caregivers are responsible for working to effect and alter the contexts in which people daily find themselves living and working, yearning and struggling, praying and paying, suffering and hoping, dying and loving when those contexts serve to dehumanize or desecrate persons, communities, environments, or relationships. By contexts I mean the entire constellation of personal, social, and systemic situations—daily home life, living conditions and arrangements, wages and financial status, neighborhood safety, abilities and skills for relating with others, stated and unstated ground rules and guidelines, educational and employment opportunities, religious or community affiliation and support—that restrict or release, oppress or liberate, enliven or suffocate people's lives. For Heschel, the motivation for transformation is justice, and justice can be understood as creating a society in which it is easier for people to become holy.²⁹

It is especially within the office, auspice, and responsibility of those involved in the ministry of pastoral care, but inclusive of each member of the community of faith however formally or informally, to address these issues by working not only for personal

²⁹Peter Maurin, co-founder with Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker Movement, used to state that one of the aims of the movement was to help create a society in which it would be easier for people to be good. Remember, as stated earlier, for Heschel the good is penultimate to the holy. See James H. Forest, Love is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 77.

transformation but for social and cosmic transformation as well.³⁰ Too often today, there is the assumption within the ministry and within communities of faith that the faith leader cannot be both pastoral and prophetic. This is a false and dangerous dichotomy. The leader of a faith community, by virtue of being the caregiver of that community, cannot afford not to be both pastoral and prophetic. I agree with Rabbi Heschel who muses: "Perhaps the demand for the "priesthood of all believers" should be supplemented by a demand for the *prophethood of all believers*." This sentiment should be applied especially to pastoral ministers. The issue is not an either-or proposition: pastor or prophet; priest or prophet. The issue is what does a given situation call for? The Rabbi, minister, or priest, the chaplain, pastoral counselor, or spiritual director, the volunteer who visits the sick, imprisoned, and homebound, the youth minister and the religious educator, are all caregivers, partners of God called at certain moments in time under specific circumstances to be, for example, more consciously pastoral or contemplative or sacramental or prophetic. It is important to remember that while these terms are helpful and descriptive of particular understandings and approaches to care, that pastoral care in actuality is a subtle yet multi-faceted affair, at once straightforward yet highly nuanced.

To assert that caregivers are called to a prophetic ministry is neither to downplay the extraordinariness of the biblical prophets nor to suggest that a prophetic approach to care means to mimic every quality and characteristic of them (anymore than we would the image of shepherd, midwife, or mystic). It is rather to transpose into our times, into our world, into the places of our lives, and into our ministries the central features of the prophetic life: listening to God, feeling *with* and *for* God, proclaiming God's word,

³⁰ Heschel, "Protestant Renewal: A Jewish View," in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 174. Matthew Fox states: "the prophetic vocation is everyone's who receives the word" of God and "Every adult has a prophetic vocation." Fox, *Prayer*, 100, 105. Thus, it is certainly the responsibility of pastoral caregivers.

committing oneself to holiness, practicing discernment, reading the signs of the time, showing compassion to others, offering an alternative vision, energizing the community, and continually struggling for justice.

Understanding openness and commitment to transformation as a constitutive dimension of pastoral care and believing in the transformational potential of caregiving on a personal, social, and cosmic level enables caregivers to consciously and more fully participate with God in the revolutionizing of history (most noticeably manifested in the realization of peace, justice, and reconciliation) and the ongoing restitution of the universe.

Pastoral Care as Prophetic Sympathy

One of the most important contributions a mystical-prophetic approach makes to care is its bold assertion of the spiritual roots of care and the subsequent theological articulation of them. To identify pastoral care as a ministry or action of prophetic sympathy is to make a theological statement with pastoral implications. Even though these implications are nuanced and not explicit, they are nonetheless important and potent. In other words, such identification speaks more to the motivation, task, and purpose of care than to a particular method, that is, to a specific pastoral plan or therapeutic technique. Yet, for the caregiver, prophetic sympathy is at the heart of a prophetic conception and approach to care, just as it is at the center of the prophet's relationship with God, view of the world, and engagement in life. As such, it not only is the driving force of what could be called a spirituality of prophetic care but also the ethos and directional influence of that care. As stated earlier, for Heschel, the prophet is a *homo sympathetikos*, first and foremost, a man or woman fired by care, concern, and

compassion for God, and then by extension for others. Thus, like the prophet, the pastoral caregiver is necessarily also a *homo sympathetikos*. Heschel writes:

[The prophet's] sympathy is an overflow of powerful emotion which comes in response to what he sensed in divinity. For the only way to intuit a feeling is to feel it. One cannot have a merely intellectual awareness of a concrete suffering or pleasure, for intellect as such is merely the tracing of relations, and a feeling is no mere relational pattern. In contradistinction to empathy, which denotes living the situation of another person, sympathy means living with another person.³¹

Human sympathy is the prophet's intentional response to be in fellowship with the divine situation. It is not fusion with Divine Being but rather an emotional solidarity and deliberate identification with the divine consciousness and divine situation. In the divine-human relationship it translates into sympathy *with* God (i.e. being concerned about what concerns God) and sympathy *for* God (i.e. feeling for God's own situation).

The way this translates practically is by emphasizing that the prophetic caregiver is, first, a man or woman of prayer. In a sense, prayer is the initial "task" of the prophetic caregiver even though ironically, as Heschel emphasizes, nothing is more inexpedient than prayer.³² Prayer is the highest form of "living with God," of intentionally, consciously, and fully being with God. In the inner environment of prayer, caregivers discover the depths of God's pathos (being *for* God) and learn the particular direction of that pathos (being *with* God). Contemplative prayer is another name for "being *for* God" (community of feeling). Simply put, prayer is solidarity with God. To pray means to be with and for God and thus is the main spiritual practice by which persons experience a shift in their subjectivity from Self to God, from self-consciousness to self-surrender.

³¹Heschel, *Prophets*, 395.

³²Heschel, *Quest for God*, xiii. This shows the "thin skin" between the mystic and the prophet or, to use another image, the kinship and close relationship between them.

Consequently, it is in prayer, especially contemplative prayer (but in corporate worship and prayerful study of scripture as well), that pastoral caregivers learn to be with and for God since, as Heschel claims, “To worship God is to forget the self.”³³ In true prayer, caregivers learn to let go of their private, political, or religious agendas and to discover what concerns God. In prayer, the pray-er is not concerned to give or to get information but rather to partake in the experience of God.

This is fertile ground for caregivers who upon encountering another person must first be able to let go of their agendas and best made plans and greet and meet the other as other, as *tselem elohim*, before rushing to diagnoses and care plans. First, one must develop the ability to be with and to “live with” the other. Again, according to Heschel, prayer begins not with petition but with praise, and praise for him means to be concerned about what concerns God.³⁴ Permit a simple anecdote.

Once I led a retreat in which I facilitated an exercise whose purpose is not important here. I gave people an hour to draw a *mandala* (a circular symbol) that was to be a representation of themselves, of who they were and who they were in the process of becoming. Later in the day, they had an opportunity to introduce themselves in a deeper way using their symbol of self. Still later in the retreat I asked them to stand in a circle and to hold their *mandalas* in front of themselves and to behold this portrait of who they were and who they were in the process of becoming. Then I asked them to pass the self symbol to the person on their right. I then asked the group to behold the picture in their hands, to take in the essence of the *mandala* that artistically alluded to the mystery of the person to their left. Then I directed them to tear up the picture. Immediately there erupted

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 18.

a collective gasp. Faces showed dismay, shocked disbelief. Questions first mumbled were soon vocalized aloud to me and others: “Are you serious? Is he serious? He can’t be serious.” I asked again. More protests. Eventually compliance as they tore up each other’s *mandalas*, disgruntled and angry. It is of note that one woman who stood immediately to the right of her mother refused to tear up her mother’s symbol of self.

Imagine (though even imaginings are too literal, too anthropomorphic) and feel how God must *feel* (feeling as a total response to reality) when after passing the sacred cosmos to humankind, humankind proceeds to tear it up. Imagine and feel how God must feel when “taking in” the dehumanization, desecration, and disfigurement of the cosmos and the persons and life that inhabit it as these afflictions infiltrate God’s creation in the form of indifference, callousness, arrogance, selfishness, violence, war, pollution, poverty, hunger, inequity, injustice, suffering.

The prophetic caregiver, like the prophet, is sensitive to the divine aspect of events. This sensitivity is not innate, limited to a feeling, nor is it learned only in prayer. It is also evoked and formed in deeds, especially deeds of compassion. As Heschel, and so many of our dialogue partners make clear, authentic prayer leads to compassion, to deep sympathy, and transitive care. We can say that for the caregiver, sympathetic action and compassionate care is prayer in the form of a deed. As “an act of inner agreement with God,” prayer becomes care in the life of the prophetic minister.³⁵

If prophetic caregivers are, firstly, persons of prayer, they are secondly, agents of pathos. Sympathy, as the appropriate human response to divine pathos, is the antithesis of emotional solitariness. It is God’s pathos that breaks through the emotional solitariness

³⁵Ibid.

between humankind and God. Prayer is the way human persons play their part in counteracting existential solitariness. When sympathy is turned from God toward another person, caregivers become agents of divine pathos, transposing it into human solidarity which breaks through the emotional solitariness between humans, counteracting loneliness with communion. Heschel makes clear:

Just as pathos implies a relation of God to the people, so sympathy . . . is motivated by attention to human existence. Sympathy, like pathos, is directed toward the people.³⁶

What characterizes the prophets is that they hold two sympathies in their souls at once: sympathy for God and sympathy for the people. The first activates the second. The second gives credence to the first. Therefore, prophetic caregivers are charged with holding both God and humans or God and the world in a single thought.³⁷ While their ears are inclined toward God, their eyes are cast toward the contemporary scene. Heschel explains, the prophet “does not take a direct approach to things. It is not a straight line, spanning subject and object, but rather a triangle—through God to the object.”³⁸ The image is not to be taken literally. Rather it is a reminder of the geometry of prophetic care: attunement with God in prayer leads to attunement with persons in care. Attunement or at-one-ment with their secret scars and even more secret dreams, with their hidden shame and their palpable hopelessness, with their anger just under the surface and their transparent desire for help, meaning, validation, and love. The central task of the prophetic caregiver is to be an agent of divine pathos. Not only a sense of wonder, but

³⁶Heschel, Prophets, 412-13.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 25.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 29.

also deep sympathy, is the therapy for spiritual autism.³⁹ There is no communion without compassion.

Without a doubt, the biblical prophets, on whom Heschel bases his phenomenology of the prophetic consciousness, are rare and singular characters, the likes of whom we have seldom seen since. Thus, at best it may seem an exercise in futility, at worst, a misguided idea altogether, to infer that individuals today, in particular, caregivers, could be so perfectly attuned and available to the pathos of God that they could discern what concerns God. Yet, Heschel reminds us that “there is a grain of the prophet in the recesses of every human existence.”⁴⁰ In addition, contemporary caregivers have the treasury of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, and in them the story of those people who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, to remind us that among other things what concerns God are the least of these, the *anawim*, the needy being forgotten, the most vulnerable—widows, orphans, strangers (add the needlessly starving, terrified, exploited, rejected, oppressed, abused, neglected, depressed, self-loathing, forgotten, molested, raped, gunned down, bombed). What concerns God is empty worship disconnected from the work of peace and justice, those who thirst for power, money, and prestige more than righteousness and justice, and those who give their allegiance to false gods.

My modest but imperative proposal is that if pastoral caregivers today cannot speak for God, at least they can feel for God, if they cannot always “embody the hurt” of others at least they can compassionately accompany them as they struggle to face and

³⁹Spiritual autism is Fr. Thomas Berry’s suggestive term. See Richard Heffern, “Thomas Berry: Earth Crisis is Fundamentally Spiritual,” National Catholic Reporter, 10 August 2001, 10.

⁴⁰Heschel, God in Search of Man, 255.

respond to reality, at least they can to help conquer callousness by reviving sensitivity and being moved. Even though pathos refers to the relatedness of God to humanity and the world and not exclusively to “suffering with,” and despite the fact that it can at times connote anger or judgment, as well as love and compassion, in the end what it always means a little more than anything else, is mercy (*Hesed*). Prophetic caregivers are mediators of mercy, partners with God in caring for the world.

Pastoral Care and Tikkun ha Olam

God's Need of Humanity

In order to appreciate pastoral care as redemptive practice, it will be helpful to clarify some essential characteristics of the divine-human relationship as understood by Rabbi Heschel. A pastoral theology influenced and inspired by Heschel's theological vision means pastoral care will be a direct reflection of his understanding of the reciprocal and covenantal relationship between God and humankind.

As a revelation not merely of God but also of humankind, pathos reveals that humanity is frequently indifferent to God's grandeur, often rebellious and defiant in response to overtures of God's care. But it also reveals that humans bear an analogy to God, and are God's partners who, at their noblest, reciprocate God's concern for being itself and share God's care for others. Heschel maintains that whereas the idea of the divine likeness of humans is known to many religions, the distinctive contribution of Judaism is to have taught the implications of this idea: namely, the metaphysical dignity of each person, the divine preciousness of human life, the inalienable rights of humans,

their incredible responsibility, and their capacity and commandedness to do good.⁴¹ The nobility and responsibility of being created in the image and likeness of God, Heschel contends, implies not just an *analogy of being* but even more so an *analogy of doing*.⁴² He writes, "Man is called upon to act in the likeness of God. 'As He is merciful be thou merciful.'"⁴³ The conviction that humans are the sacred image and the passionate concern of God, that they bear an analogy of being and are called to fulfill an analogy of doing, that they possess the capacity for self-surpassing living, is evidenced most earnestly in their participation in the life of God which is fulfilled in the intentional commitment to be God's partner in the ongoing act of creation.

Earlier we considered Heschel's conception of the reciprocal nature of faith. For Heschel, the road to righteousness begins with the Psalmist's question: "How shall I repay to the Lord all the bounty He has given to me!" (Psalm 116:12) and the way is paved with the human realization: "The dignity of human existence is in the power to reciprocate."⁴⁴ The vital, passionate exchange of divine pathos and human sympathy is one expression of this reciprocity. The living out of the covenant relationship makes actual and credible the idea that faith is mutual and interactive. Heschel states:

⁴¹Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man," 154, 155; Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 157. Regarding Heschel's conviction that humans have the capacity to do good, he points out that Judaism stresses "Man's actual failures rather than his essential inability to do the good. . . . In spite of all imperfection, the worth of good deeds remains in all eternity." It is important to note that Heschel had the unique ability to speak truths that were at the core of Judaism in such a way that they also offered a universal comfort and challenge to those of other faiths or of no particular faith at all. What he speaks as a Jew to Jews he extends intentionally to others as well knowing that deep truths have implications for all persons. An example is the idea of the sacred image of all humans. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 378; Heschel, "Confusion of Good and Evil," 144-45.

⁴²Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man," 152; Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 289.

⁴³Heschel, "Sacred Image of Man," 161.

⁴⁴Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 46.

Life is a *partnership* of God and man; God is not detached from or indifferent to our joys and griefs. . . . God is a partner and a partisan in man's struggle for justice, peace and holiness, and it is because of His being in need of man that He entered a *covenant* with him for all time, a mutual bond embracing God and man, a relationship to which God, not only man, is committed.⁴⁵

God's relationship to humanity and humanity's relationship to God are realized in the passionate living out of this covenantal partnership. For Heschel, the essence of Judaism is the awareness of this intentional and intimate exchange between God and humankind. He states, "For the task of living is [God's] *and* ours, and so is the responsibility."⁴⁶

Furthermore, since the beginning of creation, and especially since the establishment of the covenant at Sinai, according to Heschel, humans are considered by God not only partners but also symbols of the divine who are obliged not merely to mimic but to imitate God, that is, to translate continually the divine presence and pathos in real human situations. Heschel writes:

What is necessary is not *to have a symbol* but *to be a symbol*. In this spirit, all objects and all actions are not symbols in themselves but ways and means of enhancing the living symbolism of man.

The divine symbolism of man is not in what he *has*—such as reason or the power of speech—but in what he *is* potentially: he is able to be holy as God is holy. To imitate God, to act as He acts in mercy and love, is the way of enhancing our likeness.⁴⁷

In the person of the prophet, and by derivation the prophetic caregiver, we have a tangible example of the concept of *likeness*, of the human as symbol, in which the correspondence between God and humans progresses from the correspondence of *being* to the correspondence of *doing*. The prophets exhibit a harmony between intention and

⁴⁵Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 242. In this study, Heschel offers a definition of Jewish religion but then extends these ideas and ideals to humankind. Thus, he will talk not only of God's covenant with Israel but also, for example, of "Man's relationship to God . . . [being] one of active assistance." See note 132.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, Italics is mine.

⁴⁷Heschel, *Quest for God*, 126.

performance. Sympathetic feeling for the divine pathos translates into sympathy-in-action. The analogy of *doing* grounded in their divine likeness and the living out of their covenantal partnership translates into the prophets being not only recipients of divine pathos but also agents of it. As emphasized above and stated most simply, the prophetic caregiver is the agent of God's pathos. In combination with the contemplative sensibility, mystical-prophetic caregivers actualize their covenantal partnership by being symbols of God's mercy and justice, love and sympathy, both in intentional acts and in ongoing relationships of care.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, one way that Heschel sheds light on the interaction of the divine pathos and prophetic sympathy at the heart of the divine-human partnership and of prophetic care is by introducing and explicating the idea that God is in need of humanity. It is this concept in particular that leads to interpreting pastoral care itself as a ministry of *tikkun ha olam*. Although uniquely, poetically, and poignantly developed by Heschel, the idea of divine pathos and God's need of humanity is not idiosyncratic. He insists that God's need of humanity comes from a long, deep tradition within Judaism, not only self-evident on every page of the Torah, but also prominent in rabbinic Judaism as well as being one of the central motifs in Kabbalistic and Hasidic writings as we have already seen.⁴⁸ As with many of his ideas, the concept of God's need of humankind is best understood in the context of Heschel's effort to recover an authentically Jewish way of thinking and living in the face of an excessively Hellenized contemporary philosophy and theology, as well as in the midst of Western culture which

⁴⁸Susannah Heschel, "Introduction," in *Moral Grandeur*, ed. S. Heschel, xxii.

is still predominated by a Christianized civil religion.⁴⁹ Whereas such an idea flies in the face of ancient Greek thought and later classical Christian theology, Heschel claims:

The idea of God being in need of man is central to Judaism and pervades all the pages of the Bible, of *Chazal*,⁵⁰ of talmudic literature, and it is understandable in our own time. In the light of this idea, of God being in need of man, you have to entirely revise all the clichés that are used in religious language.⁵¹

For Heschel, prophetic theology and Jewish mysticism intersect at this point: God needs humankind. On the one hand, we have already seen that pathos is not a divine absolute but rather a relation established by God between God and humankind and thus that prophecy “consists in the inspired communication of divine attitudes to the prophetic consciousness.”⁵² On the other hand, in “The Mystical Element in Judaism,” Heschel remarks: “Jewish mystics are inspired by a bold and dangerously paradoxical idea that not only is God necessary to man but man is also necessary to God, to the unfolding of His plans in this world.”⁵³

Therefore, in addition to declaring human beings to be sacred images, symbols, and partners of God in a covenantal relationship, Heschel claims that the breadth of Jewish thinking shows that what distinguishes humans is the idea that humans are a *need* of God. If we begin with the presence of God, we can trace the movement of Heschel’s thought in this way: to become conscious of God’s presence is to experience God’s

⁴⁹Heschel, “Jewish Theology,” in S. Heschel, ed. *Moral Grandeur*, 156, 161.

⁵⁰Chazal is an acronym meaning “our sages of blessed memory,” and in rabbinic writings usually refers to the wisdom of Talmudic sages, either collectively or individually.

⁵¹Heschel, “Jewish Theology,” in S. Heschel, ed. *Moral Grandeur*, 159.

⁵²Heschel, *Prophets*, 288.

⁵³Heschel, “Mystical Element in Judaism,” 166.

pathos; to experience God's pathos is to become aware of the intimate relatedness of God and humankind; to be aware of the relatedness of God and humankind is to engage in a covenant; to engage in a covenant means to participate in a partnership; to participate in a partnership is to practice reciprocity; and to practice reciprocity is to become involved in a unique relationship in which not only humans are in need of God but also where God is in need of humans.

In light of this theological movement, pastoral care is viewed as one essential way for caregivers to live out their partnership with God. Pastoral care is the way caregivers respond to humankind's being a need of God in order to satisfy ends that are in need of them. Whereas Heschel believes that humans are in need of God because of who God is and because of "the constitution of their own existence, which impels them to ask ultimate questions and to stand in radical amazement,"⁵⁴ he also believes that God needs human beings, precisely because God is no longer at home in the world, indeed is a "stranger" in it.⁵⁵ He asserts that just as God has been exiled from the earth by human greed, violence, callousness, and cruelty, even more quickly God can be brought back into the world by human acts of prayer, *teshuvah*, compassion, sacrifice, mercy, and justice. Put even more strongly, "God needs human witnesses in order to 'exist' (be present) in the world."⁵⁶ Pastoral care is the result of persons and community's of faith realizing that God needs humankind to do on earth what on earth needs to be done.

⁵⁴Bernard W. Anderson, "Coexistence with God: Heschel's Exposition of Biblical Theology," in J. Merkle, ed. Exploring His Life, 59.

⁵⁵Heschel, God in Search of Man, 156.

⁵⁶This quote is Bernard Anderson's interpretation of this fundamental theme in Heschel's work. Bernard W. Anderson, "Coexistence with God: Heschel's Exposition of Biblical Theology," in J. Merkle, ed. Exploring His Life, 59.

Christians extend and particularize this idea by identifying the recipients of the works of mercy to be Christ himself as well as by viewing such acts of care as the prolongation of the incarnation.⁵⁷

It is important, and not merely ironic, to understand this concept (humankind is a need of God) in light of Heschel's assessment that one of the root causes of humankind's predicament is that modern culture has generated a vicious cycle by creating and sanctifying needs that are, at best, only temporal, and at worst, not indigenous to authentic humanity and holiness, and then by turning around and promoting the means to satisfy these fabricated needs.⁵⁸ Religion, in turn, has been allowed by those at the helm of institutional religion, to become simply the highest form of need satisfaction. However, such a worldview, understanding of religion, and ostensibly spiritual maneuver, do not serve God but instead are fundamentally self-serving, and thus actually work to diminish the integrity and invert the meaning of authentic religion. The compulsive craving of humans to satisfy their needs, even the need for religion, is not an act of self-abandonment but rather the result of persons making themselves an absolute end. Heschel states:

As long as man sees in religion the satisfaction of his own needs, a guarantee for immortality or a device to protect society, it is not God whom he serves but himself. The more removed from the ego, the more real is His presence. It is a sure way of missing Him when we think that God is an answer to a human need, as if not only armies, factories and movies, but God, too, had to cater to the ego.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Leonardo Boff, The Lord's Prayer: The Prayer of Integral Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 2.

⁵⁸Financial educator, Nathan Dungan, mentioned in a recent radio interview that American Demographics Magazine claims that persons are barraged with about 3,000 advertising impressions per day or upwards of 23 million advertising images by the time they turn twenty-one years of age. "Money and Moral Balance," Speaking of Faith, American Public Media, November 30, 2006.

⁵⁹Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 233-34.

It is in light of this view of the idolization of needs that Heschel imaginatively turns the notion of needs on its head by insisting that the lack of meaning, the inclination toward despair, the cause of psychoneurosis, and the feeling of futility actually “comes with the sense of being useless, of not being needed in the world.”⁶⁰ He insists that “the only way to avoid despair is *to be a need* rather than an end. *Happiness*, in fact, may be defined as the *certainty of being needed*.”⁶¹ To be a need *of God* shifts the focus from *getting* to *giving*, from desiring the satisfaction of one’s personal needs to the giving of oneself for a need that is greater than the self.⁶² Instead of religion being diminished to the satisfaction of a glorified need (which reduces it to nothing more than opportunism or a refined form of magic), religion is the response of being needed for an end that surpasses the self.

Thus pastoral care, as the ecclesial incarnation and horizontal thrust of religion, does not promote the way of satisfying a private need but supports the way of breaking out of the circle of the self by committing oneself to higher ends, by transcending the self in order to stand for a divine concern. Just as religion is the lived realization that “life is not meaningful . . . unless it is serving an end beyond itself, unless it is of value to someone else,”⁶³ so too pastoral care is both a response to the supreme divine worth (we

⁶⁰Ibid., 194.

⁶¹Ibid., 194-95.

⁶²It is important to realize that what Heschel means by being a need *of God* is qualitatively different than the unhealthy tendency in some persons and caregivers to help as a result of their “need to be needed.” The former, as Heschel points out, is rooted in one’s divinely originate sacred dignity and results in the desire to give (for example, to worship or to offer care) without receiving anything in return. The latter, is rooted in one’s psychologically oriented “neediness” and, when exaggerated, is actually more about getting than giving. In this case, the giving or caring can be in varying degrees emotionally smothering, manipulative, or a disguised search for approval.

⁶³Ibid., 194.

worship because God is God) and at the same time a way of acting on an ineffable desire within the human person to transcend not hoard the self.⁶⁴ Ideally, the impetus for pastoral care is not grounded in the psychologically exaggerated need to be needed but rather in the caregiver's experience of being the image and symbol of God which when evoked and actualized manifest themselves, first, as the recognition and acceptance of the other, regardless of merit, as a *tselem elohim*, and second, as the freedom to love and the choice to care for others. Practically speaking, a regular contemplative practice and a consciously contemplative life, as well as a community of mutually supportive peers to whom one is accountable, lessens the chances that the way and the reason caregivers offer care will be an unhealthy projection of one's own unattended or unresolved illusions, inner conflicts, and emotional shortfall.

According to Heschel, the secret of becoming human and holy lies in the fact that sanctity and the fullness of life cannot be experienced by human persons unless they have a sense for the sacred and until they serve something beyond themselves. At one point Heschel goes so far as to say, "Human is he who is concerned about other selves."

Heschel states:

Unlike all other needs, the need of being needed is a striving to give rather than to obtain satisfaction. It is a desire to satisfy a transcendent desire, a craving to satisfy a craving. . . . Religion begins with the certainty that something is asked of us, that there are ends which are in need of us.⁶⁵

⁶⁴This idea that religion is ignited not in order to fill a need but rather because God alone is worthy (worship signals God's unique worth-ship) is seen in various Christian liturgies, for example, in the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Sunday Eucharistic liturgy. In the Roman Rite, during the Eucharistic Prayer the presider states: "Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God," to which the assembly responds, "It is right to give Him thanks and praise."

⁶⁵Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 214, 215.

Pastoral care, then, is a way of assisting God in supporting others in realizing a transcendent desire, and thus, in becoming human and holy. It is noteworthy that for Heschel, God's need of humankind does not diminish divinity; it dignifies humanity since God's need is "a self-imposed concern." That is, humanity is a need of God because God freely chose to make humanity a partner in God's enterprise. Heschel writes:

There is only one way to define Jewish religion. It is the *awareness of God's interest in man*, the awareness of a *covenant*, of a responsibility that lies on Him as well as on us. Our task is to concur with His interest, to carry out His vision of our task. God is in need of man for the attainment of His ends, and religion, as Jewish tradition understands it, is a way of serving these ends, of which we are in need, even though we may not be aware of them, ends which we must learn to feel the need of.⁶⁶

In light of Heschel's emphasis on God's need of humankind to serve God's ends, let us look at the concept of *tikkun ha olam*.

Tikkun ha Olam

Understanding the human person as an image, partner, symbol, and need of God instigates an imaginative and alternative way of envisioning pastoral care and, as we shall see, from Heschel's perspective, is intimately connected to the Jewish mystical concept of *tikkun ha olam*. Rather than passive reliance on an omnipotent God, Heschel maintains Jewish thinking characterizes humans' relationship to God as one of active assistance.⁶⁷ Heschel insists, "The idea of Divine omnipotence, meaning, holding God responsible for everything, expecting him to do the impossible, to defy human freedom, is a non-Jewish idea."⁶⁸ Heschel states:

⁶⁶Ibid., 241.

⁶⁷Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 243.

⁶⁸Heschel, *God In Search of Man*, 160.

The whole conception of God's omnipotence, I suspect, was taken over from Islam. God is almighty, and powerful. Man has nothing to say and nothing to do except to keep quiet and to accept. But, actually, God needs man's cooperation. There will be no redemption without the cooperation of man. Omnipotence as such will not work. God cannot function in the world without the help of man.⁶⁹

The view that humans are not only in need of God but that God is in need of humankind is especially found in two sources dealt with earlier in this work, namely, the range of symbols and ideas of the early Kabbalistic cosmology up to the seventeenth century, especially the theory of the *Sefirot* in the *Zohar* which indicates not only that the created world is imperfect, still unfolding and incomplete but that God is still developing as well; and secondly, the range of symbols and concepts developed in the seventeenth century in Lurianic Kabbalah and influential until recent times which, although related to the principles of earlier Kabbalistic principles, go beyond the doctrine of the *Sefirot* and imaginatively propose the idea that God needs persons to help with and to hasten the world's redemption.⁷⁰

This ongoing process of redemption that is so crucial to Judaism includes but transcends individual healing and self-actualization. It seeks and entails the broader, messianic vision of *tikkun ha olam*. *Tikkun ha olam* not only refers to the just recreation of the social order, to the redemption of the people of Israel, but also to the restoration of the original divine unity and to the collective healing and transformation of the whole

⁶⁹Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 159.

⁷⁰Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, 125.

universe realized in “the return of all existence to its original spiritual condition, a state synonymous with the manifestation of the messianic age.”⁷¹

As noted and illustrated in Chapter Four, this intimate interaction between and two-way need of the divine and the human is one of the central themes of the Zohar. It is portrayed by the sense of motion and flow in the *sefirot* between the divine and the human, between the ordinary world on earth and the higher spiritual realm in heaven.⁷² As noted earlier, not only does the Zohar contend that the earth, the “lower world,” is patterned after heaven, the “upper world,” but more so that the worlds interact and affect each other. This idea, known as the concept of “correspondences,” means not just what God does in heaven affects humankind on earth, but also what humankind does on earth affects God and what God does in heaven.⁷³ Expounding on this point in his essay on Jewish mysticism, Heschel quotes the Zohar:

Now the act below stimulates a corresponding activity above. Thus if a man does kindness on earth, he awakens loving-kindness above, and it rests upon that day which is crowned therewith through him. Similarly, if he performs a deed of mercy, he crowns that day with mercy and it becomes his protector in the hour of need. So, too, if he performs a cruel action, he has a corresponding effect on that day and impairs it, so that subsequently it becomes cruel to him and tries to destroy him, giving him measure for measure.⁷⁴

In the kabbalistic tradition, the actions of the person and community, whether they are noble and sanctify the soul or are disgraceful and defile the soul, impact both the

⁷¹Lawrence Fine, “The Contemplative Practice of Yihudim in Lurianic Kabbalah,” in Jewish Spirituality, vol. 1, *From the Sixteenth Century Renewal to the Present*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987), 65.

⁷²William E. Kaufman, Journeys: An Introductory Guide to Jewish Mysticism (New York: Block Publishing Company, 1980), 39.

⁷³*Ibid*, 39-40.

⁷⁴Heschel, “The Mystical Element in Judaism,” in J. Nuesner, ed. To Grow in Wisdom, 168.

cosmic and the earthly-communal realm.⁷⁵ Thus, intimately familiar not only with the Torah and its creation accounts, but also with Zoharic principles and Lurianic cosmogony, for Heschel, creation is not a frozen, once-in-time event, but rather a “continuous creation,” an ongoing reality in which humans are invited to participate. It is in this tradition and spirit that he views individual, communal, cosmic, and divine *tikkun*, and for this reason that he necessarily links creation and redemption. To talk of creation as “continuous coming into being” is to speak of redemption by another name.⁷⁶ “Just as creation goes on all the time, redemption goes on all the time.”⁷⁷ In Israel: An Echo of Eternity, Heschel writes:

Redemption, scholars insisted, was not to be conceived of solely as an act that will come about all at once and without preparation. It is an ongoing, continuous process in which, all have a role to play, either retarding or enhancing the process. Not only is redemption a necessity for man, man is a necessity to redemption.⁷⁸

Aware of the emphases and perspectives of certain Christian persuasions, he continues:

For the ultimate concern of the Jew is not personal salvation but universal redemption. Redemption is not an event that will take place all at once at ‘the end of days’ but a process that goes on all the time. Man’s good deeds are single acts in the long drama of redemption, and every deed counts. One must live as if the redemption of all men depended upon the devotion of one’s own life. Thus life, every life, we regard as an immense opportunity to enhance the good that God has placed in His creation.⁷⁹

About the human responsibility and task of participating in the long drama of redemption, of retrieving the Shekinah from exile, and fostering *tikkun*, Heschel writes:

⁷⁵Green, Guide to Zohar, 114.

⁷⁶Heschel, Who Is Man?, 71.

⁷⁷Ibid., 93.

⁷⁸Heschel, Israel, 158-59.

⁷⁹Ibid., 160-61; Heschel, “Confusion of Good and Evil,” 146.

To bring about the restitution of the universe was the goal of all efforts.

The meaning of man's life lies in his perfecting the universe. He has to distinguish, gather, and redeem the sparks of holiness scattered throughout the darkness of the world. This service is the motive of all precepts and good deeds. Man holds the keys that can unlock the chains fettering the Redeemer.⁸⁰

Influenced by both the mystical and the prophetic elements of Judaism, Heschel calls attention to the fact that the God of pathos in search of humankind is a God of loving involvement and compassionate care who is in need of human persons to fulfill God's covenant as made known in the Torah, as well as to reverse the consequences of the primordial catastrophe by liberating the divine sparks, reconciling the feminine and masculine aspects of the divine (*Tif'eret* and *Malkhut* or *Shekinah*), and repairing and bringing about a new cosmos as presented especially in the Lurianic literature.⁸¹ It is in light of the kabbalists' insistence "that man is also necessary to God, that man's actions are vital to all worlds and affect the course of transcendent events" that in his own work Heschel seeks "to imbue all people with the consciousness of the supreme importance of all actions."⁸² He views the life of piety as taking personal responsibility for contributing to "the return of all things from the state of exile to one of redemption."⁸³

Before going any further let me point out that even within Judaism there is disagreement regarding the topic of *tikkun ha olam*. Some feel, on the one hand, that the concept has been bastardized by divorcing it from its original Lurianic cosmogony, and on the other hand, that the term has been politicized and diminished by making it

⁸⁰Heschel, Earth is the Lord's, 72.

⁸¹Fine, Physician of the Soul.

⁸²Heschel, Earth is the Lord's, 71.

⁸³Fine, "Contemplative Practice," 65.

synonymous with certain forms of social action and social justice. In his article, “The Rise of *Tikkun Olam* Paganism,” Steven Plaut, a Conservative Zionist economist who teaches at the University of Haifa and a columnist for the *Jewish Press*, bristles at the modern tendency to equate the concept of *tikkun* “with liberal social action political agenda.” He writes:

“*Tikkun Olam* does indeed play an important role in Jewish theology and ethics, but its meaning is nothing like that understood by the *Tikkun Olam* Pagans. *Tikkun Olam*, the “correcting” of the universe, has little if anything to do with things like social inequality, environmental cleanliness, and distribution of wealth and jobs. Rather, it refers to the Messianic era, when G-D’s laws will replace human laws, when G-D himself will be the acknowledged ruler, when all forms of idolatry will cease and all will turn their hearts to the One G-d. In other words, *Tikkun Olam* is a theological notion and not a trendy socioeconomic or political one.”⁸⁴

In a less acerbic and sardonic essay, Laurence Fine points out that many people today have clearly appropriated the notion of *tikkun olam* without recourse either to its source—Lurianism, or, for example, to one of Lurianisms’ major interpreters—Gershom Scholem.⁸⁵ Fine traces the modern adoption and adaptation of the phrase in the United States, beginning at least as early as the 1950’s with Shlomo Bardin, the founder of the Brandeis Camp Institute in California, who connected it to a line from the Aleinu prayer which mentions the perfection or repair of the world under the reign of the Almighty.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Steven Plaut, “The Rise of *Tikkun Olam* Paganism,” *The Jewish Press* (December 24, 2002), under http://www.jewishpress.com/displayContent_new.cfm?mode=a§ionid=56&contentid=14598&contentName=The%20Rise%20Of%20Tikkun%20Olam%20Paganism (accessed Oct. 6, 2005)

⁸⁵Laurence Fine, “Tikkun Olam in Contemporary Jewish Thought,” *MyJewishLearning.com* under http://www.myjewishlearning.com/daily_life/GemilutHasadim/TO_TikkunOlam/Contemp_Tikkun_Thought.htm (accessed Oct. 6, 2005).

⁸⁶The Prayer Aleinu proclaims God as sovereign ruler over a united humanity, denotes the struggle of being the chosen people and the trials that ensue from that responsibility. Tradition attributes the prayer to Joshua as he was crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. Generally it is held that it was introduced by Tanna Rav in Babylonia in the third century for Rosh Hashanah services. It has been recited as the

Bardin, Fine indicates, interpreted this line to refer to the obligation of Jews to work for a more perfect world. By the 1970's the term *tikkun ha olam* had been adopted by the United Synagogue Youth, the national youth organization of the Conservative Movement in Judaism and used as the slogan for New Jewish Agenda, an organization devoted to progressive religious and social values. By the late 1970's and early 1980's, *tikkun olam* became identified with Kabbalah again but according to Fine by now the term had undergone a change of meaning.⁸⁷ In its most common contemporary usage and conception *tikkun olam* refers to the responsibility for and the participatory action of assisting God in the repair of the conditions of this world. This is the primary sense in which I am interpreting the term and one that I feel is consistent with Rabbi Heschel's.

In its original context, Fine explains, *tikkun ha olam* had to do with repair of divinity, and was part of an eschatological vision of things which anticipated the end of history and nature as we know it by the dissolution of the material world in favor of a purely spiritual existence, similar to that which existed prior to the intra-divine catastrophe and before human sin.⁸⁸ Thus, although in Jewish mysticism *tikkun olam* did originally signal a process of repair or perfection, including a messianic repair of the world, it was not envisioned so much as a "mending" of this world as the undoing and replacement of it with a completely spiritual existence. That being said, in his book on Luria, Fine does make clear Luria's and other kabbalist's belief that human actions can and do contribute to the healing of the cosmos whether that action is devotional prayer

closing of the daily morning, afternoon, and evening services of prayer since the thirteenth century. See Jewishvirtuallibrary.org and MyJewishLearning.com.

⁸⁷Fine, "Tikkun Olam."

⁸⁸Ibid.

prayed with *kavanah*, married sexual relations, the *mitzvah* of charity (*tsedakah*), or the study of Torah (*Talmud torah*).

Having acknowledged the origin and modern appropriation of the term, Fine maintains that there are nonetheless “important resemblances between Lurianic theology and contemporary thought” which he believes explain the attraction Lurianic language holds for contemporary Jewish thinking.⁸⁹ Among these ideas is the notion of an ontological rupture and cosmic shattering which evokes deep sympathy and has great and particular appeal to a generation that experienced the destruction of European Jewry, and for a generation that lives under the foreboding shadow of nuclear calamity. In addition to this, Fine suggests “the focus on human power and human responsibility, in place of divine power and responsibility, which characterizes Lurianism, is a potent theological tool in confronting the dilemma of theodicy (explaining God’s justice in the face of the existence of evil), in our own time.”⁹⁰ Finally, unlike Plaut whose position is that of a severe and righteous gatekeeper protecting the idea of *tikkun* from pagan malfeasants and sacrilegious interlopers, Fine’s approach instead is to maintain that the very malleability of the concept of *tikkun* is one of its strengths and appeals, containing the capacity to be applied to the widest possible actions and views, being easily lifted out of its original context and transformed into a “normative” Jewish value. Thus, he adds, “a contemporary idea is thus legitimated and rendered all the more significantly by clothing it in garb of tradition, a process as old as ‘tradition’ itself.”⁹¹

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

Not only is this course of action not outlandish but, in fact, it has a long historical precedent. Judaism has long practiced the reinterpretation of authoritative texts in the form of the commentary. Arthur Green, scholar of Jewish mysticism, points out in A Guide to the Zohar, the midrashic-aggadic tradition within Judaism has always involved a hermeneutic approach in which the delving into scripture and sacred texts tended toward fanciful and extended rereadings.⁹² Moreover, as Gershom Scholem points out and as was mentioned in Chapter Four, Luria himself imaginatively created his entire elegantly complex theory of *tzimtzum* (to which *tikkun* is necessarily related) from an obscure treatise and the inversion of a Talmudic saying, thus changing the original meaning of *tzimtzum* from the concentration or contraction of God *at* a single point to the retreat or withdrawal of God *away from* a point.⁹³ Luria's own work seems to contradict any static, literalistic, mono-interpretation of what fundamentally is a highly poetic, symbolic, and anagogical concept.

As another contemporary interpreter of *tikkun olam*, Green approaches the topic with a measured and more pastoral manner. Acknowledging the ancient origin and meaning of the concept, he addresses the apparent discrepancies outlined by Plaut by suggesting that although the contemporary usage of the term might be a recent innovation whereby *tikkun ha olam* refers to "the betterment of the world, including the relief of human suffering, the achievement of peace and mutual respect among peoples, and the

⁹²Green, Guide to the Zohar, 10.

⁹³Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 260.

protection of the planet,” it is not altogether inconsistent and, in fact, “the values themselves are deeply rooted in Jewish tradition.”⁹⁴ He states:

Spreading our most basic moral message—that every person is the divine image (*tselem elohim*)—requires that Jews be concerned with the welfare, including the feeding, housing, and health, of all. The Torah’s call that we “pursue justice, only justice” (Deuteronomy 16:20) demands that we look toward closing the terrible gaps, especially in learning and opportunity, that exist within our society and undermine our moral right to the relative wealth and comfort most of us enjoy. The very placing of humans on earth “to work and guard” (Genesis 2:15) God’s garden, as well as the halakhah forbidding wanton destruction of resources, tells us that protecting the natural order is also a part of justice. The rediscovery of ancient spiritual forms in recent decades has paralleled an age of activism for political and social change. . . . In the case of Judaism, such a bifurcation of spiritual and sociopolitical concerns is hardly possible. Anyone who tries to undertake it ultimately has to deal with the prophets of ancient Israel, still the strongest and most uncompromising advocates for social justice our world has known. If you try to create a closed world of lovely Jewish piety and build it on foundations of injustice and the degradation of others, Isaiah and Amos will not let you sleep.⁹⁵

Of course, as indicated above, scholars Fine and Green are aware of the Lurianic roots and original kabbalistic idea of *tikkun olam*. But unlike Plaut who sees contemporary usages of the term as offensive, amateurish, and inaccurate, they take a more accepting and hopeful approach by choosing to see contemporary practices and actions described by practitioners of *tikkun olam* to be kin to the Lurianic notion of *tikkun* and not unrelated or opposed to it.

This is clearly the understanding of Rabbi Heschel. Intimately familiar with kabbalistic tradition and texts, Heschel emphasizes human responsibility in “the restitution of the original state of the universe and the reunion of the *Shekinah* and the *En*

⁹⁴ Arthur Green, “Words Matter: Tikkun Olam,” *SocialAction.com*, under <http://www.socialaction.com/wordsmatter.html> (accessed 10/6/2005).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Sof.⁹⁶ My sense is that Heschel understands the to-and-fro, interactive flow of the *sefirot* as the mystical expression of the equally cooperative idea of covenant that is at the heart of the Torah. Although Heschel would agree that *tikkun olam* is not identical to any political persuasion or agenda, he would nonetheless connect its realization to human acts of kindness and compassion, works of justice and peace. Whether this restoration occurs by subtraction or addition, by the dissolution of the material world or the mending of it, is not crucial to this project nor does it detract from the image of pastoral care as a ministry oriented toward *tikkun olam*. Heschel notes that there are two views within Judaism of the coming of the Messianic era that when held in tension point to both divine action and to human diligence. The one view is an apocalyptic, supernatural view that maintains redemption will appear suddenly from heaven (God's doing), while the other perspective, which found a voice in Samuel in the third century and Maimonides in the twelfth century, stresses that it will come about over time and in a natural, moral, and political way (humankind's doing). He writes:

The two views of Messianism complement each other, manifesting the inherent polarity of Judaism and, indeed, of human existence.

The spiritual without the political is blind, the political without the spiritual is deaf. The attainment of the first is an epilogue, the attainment of the second is a prologue.⁹⁷

In a sense Heschel integrates these two interpretations by combining the biblical, prophetic tradition which emphasizes that the God of pathos is in search of humanity and the kabbalistic tradition which stresses human responsibility as the way "to labor in

⁹⁶Heschel, "Mystical Element in Judaism," in S. Heschel, ed. 172.

⁹⁷Heschel, *Israel*, 159.

service of the cosmos for the sake of God.”⁹⁸ From a thorough reading of his work, as indicated in Chapter Six, it is evident that Heschel believes *tikkun ha olam*, ultimate redemption, occurs neither by sheer grace nor solely by human industry. Rather it is finally a divine achievement set in motion and prepared for by humans in the sanctification of the secular through holy thoughts, words, and deeds. He is in communion with Kabbalah which views redemption as an ongoing intentional process not a once in time event and stresses that, although an eternal reality, to begin with redemption is played out in history and on earth. While ascribing to God alone the completion of ultimate redemption, Heschel emphasizes the crucial and necessary role of humanity in the ongoing process of redemption. This role and responsibility involves humankind overcoming its ignominy by bringing back the *Shekinah* from exile and bringing about universal and divine harmony by raising the sparks through lives of devotional piety and acts of compassion and justice. However, because of his insistence on the active pathos of God in history, Heschel cannot conceive of God as totally passive. If God is waiting in the wings, then God is waiting to be brought back into the life of the believer, community, and world *now* not merely at the end and fullness of time.

Let us look now at how contemporary pastoral care might benefit from this ancient concept of *tikkun ha olam*.

Pastoral Care as Redemptive Practice

A theology and practice of care rooted in divine pathos guarantees that caregiving itself always will be understood as a constitutive dimension of faith. Not to care is to render spirituality not only false but dead, denigrating faith by reducing it to a private

⁹⁸Heschel, Earth is the Lord's, 62.

affair, little more than the mere satisfaction of personal needs. In addition to a theology of pathos, which helps us recover the spiritual roots of care, a prophetic pastoral theology inspired by Heschel's work necessarily includes the commitment to *tikkun ha olam* as a vital and requisite dimension of the spiritual life and, therefore, of pastoral care. Rabbi Heschel's understanding and personal practice of *tikkun olam* is based on the conviction that a thoroughly divine, cosmic, and spiritual reality is evoked by utterly human, historical, and earthly endeavors. It is his conviction about human responsibility and his passion about the cooperative venture of redemption that encourages us to understand and practice pastoral care both as a participation in (or preparation for) *tikkun ha olam* and as a ministry whereby caregivers encourage and support others along the same path of *tikkun*. It is in this sense that pastoral care can be described as a redemptive practice.

For Heschel, humanity's nobility resides in the fact that persons have the capacity to be holy and thereby to be compassionate witnesses of God's pathos here and now which offers a taste of heaven on earth. He asserts:

The creation of the world is an unfinished process. The goals are not attained.

There is a cry for justice which only man must answer. There is a need for acts of compassion that only man must satisfy.⁹⁹

Prophetic pastoral care is a ministry of *tikkun ha olam*, for as Rabbi Heschel says, "To exist as a human is to assist the divine."¹⁰⁰ Pastoral care is the ecclesial and synagogal means for assisting the divine in realizing the dream of God. Thus, at its core, prophetic pastoral care is a redemptive practice whereby caregivers, in response to their fundamental human vocation and task, participate in the ongoing drama of redemption in

⁹⁹Heschel, "Children and Youth," in *Insecurity of Freedom*, 49.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

and through acts of care. Although Jews and Christians have divergent understandings of redemption, I believe each are able to conceive of and carry out pastoral care as a redemptive act within the parameters, theological orientation, and customs of their tradition. Envisioning pastoral care with an eye to *tikkun ha olam* makes at least three important contributions to pastoral theology and care: First, it prevents caregiving from being reduced to isolated individual acts. Second, it makes concern for and the making of justice a constitutive dimension of pastoral care; and third, it offers a meeting place where people of various faith traditions can come together in shared actions of care.

The Communion of Care

To conceive of pastoral care in light of *tikkun ha olam* insures that the call to care, understood not only as the call to care for persons but for holiness and justice, is not conceived of as a private, individualistic endeavor. Thus, it expands the notion, practice, and implications of care beyond the strictly personal dyad of caregiver and care receiver to include communities, social structures, the environment, all of creation, and even God. This unique kabbalistic concept offers a provocative and alternative metaphor for how we image and why we practice caregiving (let alone our faith). Perhaps because too little attention has been given to a theology of care, much of what passes, for example, as Christian caregiving (even by pastors or pastoral counselors), too often becomes little more than isolated, individual operations done on behalf of other isolated, individual persons. Whereas, theoretically, at best, it is connected to the mission, meaning, and corporate life of the faith community as generated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, in reality, caregiving in Christian ministry is frequently a lone ranger affair of the few instead of the practice of the many who understand it as an imperative of the gospel

by virtue of their baptism, and as a requisite dimension of authentic faith and holistic care. Understanding pastoral care in light of *tikkun ha olam* does not denigrate or diminish the importance of one-to-one care. On the contrary, it raises the importance of each act of care, of every appointment, of each chance meeting, since even the most seemingly insignificant or mundane pastoral encounter is infused with eternal value and consequence, contributing to (for Jews) or incarnating (for Christians) the mystery of redemption.

Jewish therapist and teacher of mysticism, Estelle Frankel explains the more expansive possibilities for care when it is understood in light of *tikkun*. She writes:

... contemporary psychotherapy traditionally seeks to help the individual person achieve a greater reliance on subjective, inner truth and on personally defined values. If spirituality is considered at all in psychotherapy, it is typically in individualistic, subjective terms, rather than as part of a larger, collective framework of meaning. In contrast to psychotherapy, with its more limited aims, which are geared toward individual healing and self-actualization, Judaism has the broader, messianic vision of *tikkun olam*—the collective healing and transformation of the world. Individual *teshuvah* is only one aspect of this. The work of the truly pious Jew does not stop with the achievement of personal fulfillment but extends to the collective effort of bringing about world repair and redemption and an end to human suffering.¹⁰¹

However hidden, unknown, or seemingly isolated the act of care, when understood as a *mitzvah* and reframed and held within the mystery and meaning of *tikkun ha olam*, the caregiver is joined together across time and space to a communion of saints, incorporated into a sacred circle of care, as is the act itself which is connected to a litany of past deeds that have accumulated through the ages serving to civilize humankind and helping to sanctify the world. As a result, individual caregivers can consciously conceive of and intentionally connect their pastoral practice not only to others in their tradition or in

¹⁰¹Frankel, *Sacred Therapy*, 141-42.

similar work but also to the ongoing drama of redemption. The action and practice of care connects more than just the giver and the receiver of care.

The importance and expansiveness of seemingly private acts of care holds true not only for the givers of care but for the receivers of care as well. If introduced appropriately, sensitively, and imaginatively (that is, to the right person at the right time in the right way) in spiritual direction, pastoral counseling, or one-to-one care, an image like *tikkun ha olam* can be a boon to a person's movement toward greater emotional health, genuine humanness, and holiness. In her book, Scared Therapy, Frankel points out that helping others to place their personal dramas within the context of these ancient and cosmic myths enabled some of her clients to find additional energy and courage to persevere in their life situations.¹⁰² Seeing one's life in a context larger than oneself contains opportunities for realizing new possibilities, for discovering one's own significance, and for recognizing that one has an essential and unique part to play, however small, in the unfolding macro-narrative of life and of God's creation. One person's movement toward authentic humanness and holiness—whether in the form of being more honest about oneself, daring genuine self-love, accepting one's shortcomings, naming a fear or personal wound, confessing one's sins, expressing contrition, offering forgiveness to oneself, others, or God, recognizing one's prejudices and imperfections, letting go of anger, recovering a lost dream, grieving a loss, facing into the darkness of depression, becoming aware of others in need, deciding to make a dangerous decision based on one's convictions—enhances the humanness and holiness of the families, communities, and world in which we live and of which we are a part. Attention to *tikkun*

¹⁰²Ibid., 126.

ha nephesh, healing and restoring our souls, tips the balance toward *mishpat*, *tsedakah*, and *hesed* and thus contributes to *tikkun ha olam*, healing and mending the world.

Care as the Expression of and the Call for Justice

Prophetic care is defined by its concern for justice since more than anything else, the word prophetic means to struggle for justice.¹⁰³ In addition to broadening one's understanding and practice of care, expanding it to include the idea of *tikkun olam* also insures that social justice will be considered a constitutive dimension, concern, and aim of pastoral care. Pastoral care that is an authentic expression of Jewish and Christian spirituality can never again be considered *primarily* or *exclusively* in terms of one-to-one counseling, and what is more, as counseling determined not so much by those who are burdened and in need but by those who are blessed with the privilege and the means to seek help for their problems. Since *tikkun ha olam* requires a call to action and a commitment to do justice, a prophetic pastoral theology and care will insure that justice begins by addressing, on the one hand, whether all persons have equal access to care and, on the other hand, whether caregiving ministries are inclusive of, if not synonymous with, the works of mercy and justice not merely individual counseling.

Since an integral pastoral care insists that we make a special effort to attend to the neediest and most vulnerable, then prophetic imagination will be required to figure out ways to provide care for those least capable of or least effective in doing what they need to do in order to receive the necessary help. Additionally, whether offered in individual, communal, or societal contexts, prophetic caregiving will require caregivers to add to their assessment tools the art and discipline of looking and listening with an eye and ear

¹⁰³Fox, *Creation Spirituality*, x, 35.

to injustice. Writing about spiritual direction, a ministry of care often mistakenly conceived of in individualistic terms, Kathleen Fischer accentuates:

... spiritual direction is always linked to a commitment to end injustice, not just for the individual person but for all persons. Holiness is built on a new politics. It involves a commitment to creating communities of mutuality and justice. The vision of the new person is related to a vision of a new humanity, a new society.¹⁰⁴

A situation, for example, in which a female client, parishioner, directee, or stranger discloses spousal abuse and then proceeds to reveal that she is part of a family, religious tradition, or faith community whose theology, way of life, and/or image of God directly or indirectly justifies such behavior immediately makes caregiving a matter of justice, first for the individual seeker of care, and then beyond the boundaries of any single victim since there is no private, self-contained injustice.¹⁰⁵ Pushing the conception and practice of care beyond the image of tender concern for an individual to its connection to justice is poignantly summed up by the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., himself a pastoral caregiver and spiritual guide not just of persons but of a people and a nation:

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.¹⁰⁶

A pastoral care that is intentionally and consciously related to justice, as Walter Brueggemann points out, means that caregiving will at various times involve three

¹⁰⁴Kathleen Fischer, Women at the Well: Feminist Perspectives on Spiritual Direction (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 46.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 53-74. Fischer explains how important it is for spiritual guides to support, in this case, women, to explore more fully their images of God and the role they play in their perception of self and world and how doing so contributes personal and communal holiness and wholeness.

¹⁰⁶Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," in A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., ed., James M. Washington, (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 290.

interconnected actions that are the necessary and dynamic outgrowths of two interrelated and characteristic dimensions of prophetic engagement, namely, criticism and energizing.¹⁰⁷ The three prophetic actions are: solidarity, resistance, and imagination. Again, this is true whether the care is offered in an individual, communal, or systemic context.

As an essential quality of prophetic consciousness, criticism, of course, does not refer to petty complaining, reckless condemning, or cynical carping anymore than energizing refers to a shallow, flashy optimism packaged as the power of positive thinking. For our purposes here, we can say that prophetic criticism is the prayerful process of learning to see what “is” in light of what “ought” to be. It is a developed capacity to discern (Latin, *discernere*, “to sift apart”), that is, to make healthy assessments and holy judgments as the result of bringing two forces into an effective interface. The art and discipline of prophetic criticism comes into play when a therapist is listening to a grown man face for the first time the devastating effects of being raised by two alcoholic parents, or when a spiritual director is supporting a Catholic woman swirling with angst and anger because she feels called to priestly ministry in a tradition that does not ordain women, or when members of a peace organization listen to people who long for peace in a continually war-torn and terrorized homeland. Prophetic criticism is a trained intelligence, a wisdom grounded in prayer, reflection on scripture, the *sensus fidelium*, intuition, human experience, and spiritual guidance.¹⁰⁸ It begins with listening. Because it involves both recognizing what is and living or making decisions in light of

¹⁰⁷Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 14.

¹⁰⁸In the Catholic tradition, the *sensus fidelium*, (“the sense of the faithful”) refers to the idea that beliefs, consciences, and experiences of the community of faith is one of the valid sources of truth.

what ought to be, as can be inferred from the three examples cited immediately above, its primary idiom, Brueggemann maintains, is anguish or grief, not anger.

By energizing is meant that process by which persons are helped to see and to nurture alternative perceptions and consciousness and to imagine new possibilities in the midst of limiting, destructive, or dehumanizing situations. This spiritual practice is grounded in the same fertile ground as prophetic criticism and its primary idiom, according to Brueggemann, is not optimism but rather hope and amazement.¹⁰⁹ Brueggemann asserts that “the task of prophetic ministry is to hold together criticism and energizing,” arguing that one without the other is incompatible with the freedom of God and authentic, transformative care.

A pastoral care spawned by a theology of pathos and oriented toward the actualization of the justice inherent in *tikkun ha olam* means that caregivers are called to practice prophetic criticism (whether of neglectful, abusive parents, an inflexible religious institution, or the propagators of a culture of violence and death) through compassionate solidarity.¹¹⁰ If, for Heschel, compassion is “the essential sign of being human,” which it is, then it follows that sympathetic solidarity is the hallmark of an approach to care inspired and guided by his vision.¹¹¹ Brueggemann explains:

Compassion constitutes a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as

¹⁰⁹Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 96.

¹¹⁰It is important to note that like any true (prayerful) prophet, prophetic caregivers must practice self-reflection regarding their own practices, beliefs, ideologies, and institutions as well as facilitate the self-reflection process of others (for example, parishioners, clients, and directees). See Fox, *Prayer*, 107, 108. Critical reflection is not legitimate or authentic if it is only or always directed toward the other.

¹¹¹Heschel, “Existence and Celebration,” in S. Heschel, ed. *Moral Grandeur*, 29.

normal and natural but it is an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness.¹¹²

When the solidarity present in prophetic care is offered in contexts of social injustice, compassion becomes more than a personal emotional reaction and becomes instead a public criticism, challenge, and seed of transformation. As Brueggemann emphasizes, compassion is the undoing of the royal or dominant consciousness because it involves recognizing hurt, entering into another person's or community's pain, and inviting grief when "empires live by numbness" and are built on secrecy and denial. A current example of this is the United States government's impeding the news media's attempt to cover the ongoing ritual of dead soldiers coming home from Iraq in flag-covered coffins.

In addition to appearing as compassion, prophetic criticism appears at times as resistance understood as the desire, struggle, or ability to say, "No." By providing a safe environment and opportunity for persons or communities to grieve, caregivers help the recipients of care make resistance imaginable in the present and possible in the future. In cases where past experiences of harm, tragedy, unnecessary suffering, or injustice cannot be undone, grieving makes possible a certain retroactive resistance by providing the receivers of care an opportunity to begin to express feelings that were consciously or subconsciously present at the time of the injurious event or circumstance but unable to be expressed or acted upon (for example, in the case of a sexually abused child). Through the embrace of pathos and compassionate solidarity, the caregiver not only gives the mourner permission to grieve, but in the process validates and honors the grieving person's or community's experience of wrongdoing or injustice. Brueggemann states,

¹¹²Brueggemann, Prophetic Imagination, 85.

“The real criticism [and resistance] begins in the capacity to grieve because that is the most visceral announcement that things are [were] not right.”¹¹³ In the communion of care, in the invitation to mourn, in the freedom to grieve, the giver and the receiver of deep sympathy give each other the opportunity to become more human which is imperative if any hope of real healing is to be realized. Numbness, secrecy, denial and the shame and guilt that so often accompany them are freed from the prisons once cruelly constructed within human persons or communities. Hidden here is the secret of becoming human and holy, as the task of mystical and prophetic care is to encourage and support people in engaging fully in history, whether that history is beautiful or terrible, mysterious or mundane, full of pain or full of promise.

Accepting the concept of *tikkun ha olam* and offering prophetic care is based on a creative move, one grounded in imagination and in trust in God’s care and the divine desire for healing and total transformation. Justice, called forth by a sense of the “ought,” and energized by hope and imagination that dare to conceive of another way, another day, another outcome, another situation, is the companion of solidarity and resistance, and the full flowering of prophetic criticism. An essential task, responsibility, and privilege of pastoral caregivers committed to *tikkun ha olam* is “to bring people to engage the promise of newness that is at work in [their] history with God.”¹¹⁴ The solidarity inherent in prophetic care demands from caregivers not only the exhausting, anguishing, and painful task of being with people in their despair and agony but also the exhilarating, life-giving, and encouraging task of being with people in their hope and dreaming. Solidarity cuts

¹¹³Brueggemann, Prophetic Imagination, 20. Additions are mine.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 62-63.

both ways. The ministry of cultivating criticism and inviting resistance gives way to the ministry of hope which is portrayed in the Jewish and Christian scriptures as encouraging people (literally “giving them courage”) to refuse to accept a permanent consignment to chaos, oppression, barrenness, and exile. Only those caregivers who walk with people through the valley of the shadow of death will be credible proclaimers of hope and witnesses of the newness of life. Only those who care enough to grieve with others, Brueggemann interprets Jesus as saying, will know joy.¹¹⁵ Once again, Walter Brueggemann’s words capture the heart of the matter. He writes:

... prophetic ministry does not consist of spectacular acts of social crusading or of abrasive measures of indignation. Rather, prophetic ministry consists of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people see their own history in the light of God’s freedom and his will for justice.¹¹⁶

Care as Mitzvah in the Service of Redemptive Practice

It would be easy to dismiss the concept of *tikkun ha olam* as nothing more than an esoteric, complex, and religiously specific doctrine. However, as a Catholic pastoral theologian and caregiver, I humbly submit that it engenders important and crucial possibilities for a world that has turned the corner into a new millennium. Without minimizing its Lurianic origin or denying its earliest connotations, and without co-opting or Christianizing this elegantly mystical and Jewish idea, I dare to believe that instead of being a cause for division, or the private possession of a few scholars, or the blessing of a few contemporary practitioners of Jewish mysticism, the concept of *tikkun ha olam* can be a meeting point and a bridge between people of various faith traditions—both in inter-

¹¹⁵Ibid., 112.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 110.

faith dialogue and in shared action. I believe that Christians and the community of Christian caregivers especially can benefit from and be challenged by insights associated with the concept of *tikkun olam*. As well as expanding our idea of care beyond the personal dyad of counseling and drawing our attention to the fact that the promotion of justice is an integral part of care (making things right even as God is making all things new), the insights associated with *tikkun olam* include the idea that creation is not complete but, in fact, dynamic and continuous, and also that in our *doing*, in our *actions*, in our *care*, we are actually participating in a reality that transcends the purely personal and the immediately temporal in which we so often conceive of pastoral care, namely redemption of all creation. Admittedly, to identify pastoral care as a redemptive practice is to make a statement of faith not to offer a practical instruction. It is a theological proclamation that speaks more to the “why” (motivation) and “what” (task) of care than to the “how” (method) of care. But since theology informs practice as well as is informed by it, this proclamation is not insignificant.

By now we are well aware of the Zoharic and sefirotic idea that the world is still unfolding, a work-in-progress, and of the view that humans have a vital role to play in nudging it in the direction of completion. But there has been emerging with Christian theology as well (spurred on by continual scientific discoveries about the universe) a recovery of the sense of the dynamism of the universe. In an interview with George V. Coyne, the former director of the Vatican Observatory, Coyne contends that his scientific knowledge of the universe as a whole and of life in the universe actually reveal a great deal to him about God. He comments:

It says that God did not create a ready-made universe, he did not create a universe like a Lego kit, putting all the pieces out and having somebody

out there, over time, assemble them. He created a universe that has a dynamism, a creativity of its own. He shared his own creativity with the universe that he made.

You know, theologians have for centuries had this notion of continuous creation, creation as not a single event in the past, 14 billion years ago, but ongoing. It really helps me in my religious belief, in my prayer for instance, to think of a god who is constantly nurturing the universe; he gave the universe its own creativity, its own dynamism, and he's working *with* the universe rather than *dominating* the universe.¹¹⁷

Although it is beyond the scope of this current project to consider the full range of implications of such a statement, it is worth noting in light of our discussion thus far that minimally it would seem to suggest that Christian pastoral theologians and mystical-prophetic caregivers must consider what a pastoral care that is working *with* the creativity of the universe and *with* a God who is nurturing not dominating the universe might look like and in what new directions it might need to look for guidance.

Minimally it means that Christians need to recover a cosmic Christology, and wrestle as pastoral theologians and caregivers with its implications for the ministry and meaning of care. Minimally it means that despite the fact, or perhaps, because of the fact that Christians believe that all of life, including creation itself, is redeemed and lives between the "already" and the "not yet," that Christians are obliged to move the setting and the concerns of pastoral care beyond the strictly personal and interpersonal to the cosmic, for while the cosmos continues to develop according to its own creativity, humanity continues to develop more devious and effective ways to destroy it. We need cosmic caregivers not merely pastoral ones. Minimally it means that those caregivers working in situations of personal and interpersonal suffering and healing must do their best to understand their ministry within the larger web of the suffering and healing of the

¹¹⁷Jim McDermott, "The Fertile Universe: An interview with George V. Coyne, former director of the Vatican Observatory," *America*, 23 October, 2006, 18.

cosmos itself. Allow me to quote at length creation-centered theologian, Matthew Fox, who has these challenging words for us to consider:

The Good News we yearn to hear and that Mother Earth herself yearns to feel is that salvation is about solidarity: solidarity with God, neighbor, and all of God's creatures. The idea of a private salvation is utterly obsolete. Only a Newtonian worldview of piecemealness could have spawned the popular heresy that salvation is an individualistic or private matter. In a world of interdependence there is simply no such thing as private salvation. . . . Those who indulge exclusively in their personal salvation and their personal savior do so in direct contradiction to the entire teaching of the Cosmic Christ crucified for all. Salvation must be universal in the sense of comprehensive, a healing of all the cosmos' pain, or it is not salvation at all. The trivialization of religion comes precisely from the failure to appreciate cosmic suffering and therefore cosmic healing or redemption.

He continues:

The Cosmic Christ leads us to explore suffering and new levels of truth and honesty instead of covering it up. For example, given humanity's destructive power represented not only in the nuclear weapons buildup but also in nuclear power plants such as Chernobyl or in chemical factories as Bhopal in India, is it not evident that the *demonic* aspect of human power is cosmic in scope? In other words, we can no longer limit our powers of destruction to "personal" or even "interpersonal" infliction of pain. National boundaries can no longer fence out the pain humans are capable of inflicting on Mother Earth and her children. . . .

Since the pain, suffering, and sin are cosmic—bigger than we can control and far more complex in space and time than we can imagine—the redemption must be cosmic as well. If the demonic aspect of the human psyche is capable of inflicting such cosmic pain, isn't the *divine* aspect of this same psyche also capable of effecting cosmic healing? The Cosmic Christ insists on this possibility and can show us the way! Cosmic redemption is a response to cosmic evil. . . .

The compassionate solidarity that Jesus learns comes from the cosmic suffering he undergoes. The same is true of us. We imbibe the healing power of the Cosmic Christ to the extent that we are emptied of mere personal suffering to experience all suffering as cosmic or shared suffering. . . .

Wherever injustice reigns the Cosmic Christ is crucified again. This also means that wherever justice is fought for and prevails; wherever healing takes place and is passed on; wherever compassion prevails; the

Cosmic Christ is healing, redeeming, liberating on a cosmic scale. The Cosmic Christ leads the way to cosmic redemption.¹¹⁸

Fox points out that Christian scholar of church history, Jaroslav Pelikan, maintains that the challenge of enlightenment philosophy and the church's response of going in search of the "historical Jesus" unfortunately deposed the cosmic Christ. Fox concludes:

One might expect that, when rationalism and patriarchal mindsets drive out mysticism, intuition, imagination, and above all cosmology, the Cosmic Christ would be banished as well. If humanity can survive without a cosmology, why would it need a Cosmic Christ? If the mind has "outgrown" mysticism, why would it need a Cosmic Christ? In an anthropocentric era of culture, education, and religion, there is no need of a Cosmic Christ. Such a concept is an embarrassment. If Newton is correct and our universe is essentially a machine, who needs a Cosmic Christ? There is no mystery in a machine-universe. The concept of "mystery" itself is reduced to the level of an "unsolved problem."¹¹⁹

Christians committed to the mystical-prophetic life, and Christian caregivers committed to supporting others in enjoying and improving life, in participating in the ongoing dynamism of creation and redemption cannot afford to look away from the continual creation of the universe whose dynamism is oriented toward all life coming to be in the image and likeness of God. The heart of a prophetic approach to care is not only commitment to compassionate action but also to participate in the struggle for justice and the renewal of the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30).

Where Christian theology and biblical Judaism understand the appearance of the messiah as signaling the *onset* of redemption, kabbalistic thought views the messiah's appearance as evoked by humankind's daily effort to raise the sparks left over from the

¹¹⁸Fox, Coming of the Cosmic Christ, 151, 152, 153.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 77.

breaking of the vessels (*shevirat ha kelim*) and as heralding the *completion* of redemption. Arthur Green writes:

According to one legend, [the messiah] sits among the lepers at the gates of Rome—today we would be likely to find him in an AIDS hospice—tending to their wounds. Only when redemption is about to be completed will messiah be allowed to arrive. *Rather than messiah redeeming us, we redeem messiah.*¹²⁰

Even though for some Christians, this view will seem foreign and offensive, if not blasphemous, appearing to diminish if not discount altogether the saving work of Christ, for others the idea of, if not the need and call for, humanity participating in the ongoing creation or redemption of the world will seem neither objectionable nor overtly unchristian. Granted the motivation is different. But in fact, while still believing in the salvific work of Christ, many Christians will be sympathetic to and challenged by this notion that is central to an understanding of *tikkun olam*, prodded to further thought and action. Despite the obvious difference in how Jews and Christians view the person and work of Jesus, many Christian caregivers will consider Heschel's comments to be important for the construction and practice of a pastoral care that seeks to connect faith and action, the spiritual and the historical, in order for it to have integrity in a world that is daily filled with so much unnecessary and inflicted suffering. But in what sense can both Jewish and Christian caregivers use the idea of *tikkun olam* to conceive of pastoral care as a redemptive practice?

In addition to God's need of humanity, it is the Jewish notion of *mitzvah* as described in Chapter Six that provides the rationale and inspiration for Jewish caregivers to view and practice pastoral care as a redemptive act. For Heschel, *mitzvah* represents "a

¹²⁰ Arthur Green, *Seek My Face, Speak My Name: A Contemporary Jewish Theology* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1992), 186-87.

science of deeds” by which he means a way of knowing and being known by God for it is in doing, in actions, and in deeds that humans have the greatest potential to act in the likeness of God and therefore to come close to God. Jewish caregivers can find great motivation, encouragement, and solace in what Heschel calls “the divinity of deeds.”¹²¹ Heschel breathes new life into this tradition with his poetic and poignant way of emphasizing how the common deed, when done with prayerful intention, serves to tip the scales toward righteousness, to woo the messiah, and to help make the world worthy of redemption. With his emphasis on every Jewish person’s responsibility to live his or her life as an answer to divine gratuity, as a way to bear a resemblance to God, and as a means to bring the divine and humankind nearer to one another, acts of kindness, mercy, compassion, and justice in particular are charged with a special power to bring the *Shekinah* home from exile and to accomplish cosmic and divine harmony. Heschel explains:

We live by the conviction that acts of goodness reflect the hidden light of His holiness. His light is above our minds but not beyond our will. It is within our power to mirror His unending love in deeds of kindness, like brooks that hold the sky.¹²²

The significance of caregiving is intensified in light of the conviction that each deed counts, that the heart is revealed in the deeds, and that God is a partner to and revealed in human acts.¹²³ Heschel states:

Man, formed in His likeness, was made to imitate His ways of mercy. He has delegated to man the power to act in His stead. We represent Him in

¹²¹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 288.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 290.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 284, 285, 287.

relieving affliction, in granting joy. Striving for integrity, helping our fellow men; . . . it is all an effort to represent Him.¹²⁴

As *mitzvot*, acts of care are not only an act of communion between the caregiver and the receiver of care but an act of partnership between the caregiver and God as well, for as Heschel states, “a mitzvah is an act which God and man *have in common*.”¹²⁵ If what makes care pastoral is its explicit connection to the faith community, then what makes it truly spiritual is not merely the sense of acting on behalf of God, but rather of acting in union with God. In this context, caregiving is participatory action whereby humans act out their end of the divine-human partnership. The kabbalists believe that the intentional, faith-filled observance of the commandments, *mitzvot*, are not only testimony to Israel’s love of God and faith in Sinai, but are to be seen as “an active engagement in the drama of redemption.”¹²⁶ Arthur Green writes:

We [Jews] see redemption too much as a process to allow ourselves to sit by and pray for the advent of the one who will make it happen. We rather seek out the spark of messianic soul within ourselves, trying to set ourselves to work at some part of messiah’s task. Messianic faith is made real for us not by endless generations of patient waiting, but by doing the work of redemption day after day.¹²⁷

Jewish caregiving, through *kavanah* or proper consecration, holds not merely personal significance but is infused with eternal significance for it is an intentional and conscious way of making the world ready for and worthy of redemption. This exalted vocation and responsibility reveals the manner and goal of caregiving as well as the mystery and meaning of all human efforts and the totality of human life.

¹²⁴Ibid., 290.

¹²⁵Ibid., 287.

¹²⁶Ibid., 184.

¹²⁷Ibid.

Whereas the kabbalists view acts of piety, worship, kindness, compassion, and justice, as *prompting* the coming of the messiah and *activating* the fullness of redemption, Christians are able to view such acts as the grateful *response to* and the logical, coherent *articulation* of redemption which they believe is already accomplished in Jesus Christ but not yet fully realized. Heschel's explication of *mitzvot* and *tikkun olam* prod Christian caregivers to be more intentional about and conscious of locating their ministry in the mystery of redemption which is at the heart of their faith, viewing and practicing care as an intentional and conscious way of participating in and living out in the world the new life they claim is theirs in Christ. This means attending to and promoting the signs of redemption: peace, justice, reconciliation, sympathy, liberation, healing, and love.

Whether one yearns for it to be in heaven as it is on earth (as do kabbalists) or for it to be on earth as it is in heaven (as do Christians), Jews and Christians alike are called to participate in the hope and reality of redemption. Jews offer care to others and in so doing understand that they prepare the world for redemption. Christians offer care and in so doing understand that they perpetuate redemption. What for Heschel is "the divinity of deeds" might be thought of by Christians as the incarnational nature of deeds, as an opportunity to "practice the presence of God," meaning simultaneously to offer to the other the pathos of God and to see the other as a temple in whom God dwells.¹²⁸ For Christians, acts of caregiving are a gospel imperative as spelled out in Matthew 25:34-45. As such, pastoral care is the prolongation of the incarnation, and not merely of the incarnation but of the salvation accomplished in, through, and by it. St. Teresa of Avila's

¹²⁸I Corinthians 3:16.

famous prayer resembles Heschel's conviction that "the sacred deed is the divine in disguise."¹²⁹ Like Heschel's statement, it expresses the fundamental motivation of care.

She writes:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
 no hands but yours,
 no feet but yours.
 Yours are the eyes through which is to look out
 Christ's compassion to the world;
 Yours are the feet with which he is to go about
 doing good;
 Yours are the hands with which he is to bless
 [persons] now.¹³⁰

In the act of care, the caregiver is the symbol of God's presence and pathos. Humans cannot become holy apart from the world in which they live and for which they care deeply. It would do no harm to Christians to follow Rabbi Heschel's counsel and to live as if the redemption of others depended on one's own life (not by proselytizing but by the quality of mercy, love, compassion, and justice). To offer kindness and attentive care is to crown the day with kindness and care. To offer callousness and cruelty is to crown the day with callousness and cruelty. To offer someone life, not necessarily full-blown life but just a glimmer of hope, is to crown the day with hope and to participate in the fullness of life.

In both the Jewish and Christian tradition, pastoral caregiving is a tangible and necessary way to enter into the partnership of God through acts of love, compassion, and justice--acts that embody, evoke, cultivate, encourage, and support person's experiencing the presence and pathos of God. It is a significant way that people from different streams

¹²⁹Heschel, God in Search of Man, 312.

¹³⁰James T. Kieling, comp. and ed., The Gift of Prayer: A Treasury of Personal Prayer from the World's Spiritual Traditions (New York: Continuum, 1995), 163.

within Judaism or different denominations or traditions within Christianity as well as people from across major faith traditions can enter into a partnership with one another despite their differences. It is in the concern for justice, in the commitment to righteousness, and in the performance of sacred deeds and acts of compassion where not only heaven and earth meet but where all people come together as well. In the midst of turf wars, holy wars, the war of words, and doctrinal wars, pastoral care, defined earlier as *the effulgence of God's love under the form of human presence and personalized compassion in the name of the community of faith*, can become the holy ground on which people of various religious persuasions join forces for good. What we share in common is the call and the responsibility to care. Not to care is to shirk one's responsibility to the faith community as well as to the human community since withholding or neglecting care either impedes the ongoing process of creation or contradicts the reality of redemption. Despite the different understandings of redemption, perhaps we can agree that redemption represents the fullness of peace, justice, reconciliation, harmony, and love and that any act that fosters these realities is a way of participating in God's ongoing creation and eternal redemption. What at first may appear to be an irreconcilable difference, in another sense may be a matter of starting at opposite ends and moving toward the same center. For the point of life, Heschel contends is "To labor in the service of the cosmos for the sake of God" which is a noble and multivalent description of the intent of mystical-prophetic care whether one is a Jew or a Christian.

Mystical-Prophetic: The Holy Alliance

The hyphen that joins our two operative images, mystical-prophetic, is not incidental but central to the modest but imperative proposal of this dissertation. Rabbi

Heschel's unusual title as a faculty member at The Jewish Theological Seminary—Professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism—not only alludes to his commitment to hold together in holy tension these apparent opposites but also points to the main thrust of this dissertation for the purpose of constructing a more holistic pastoral care. One of the most important contributions of Heschel's life and work as a basis for an approach to care is his insistence on the intimate, dynamic, and symbiotic relationship between the mystical and the prophetic dimensions of life and faith. Edward Kaplan maintains that this is “the goal of his entire work: *the unity of inward piety and prophetic activism*.”¹³¹ Although present in and central to Heschel's writings from the start, there is an even greater sense of urgency and an increasingly public conviction about this relationship toward the end of his life. It is summed up in two lines from a meditation on the words of Ezekiel 34:25-31 he offered at an interfaith worship service on January 31, 1967 during the height of the Vietnam War. He said, “Vietnam is a personal problem. To speak about God and remain silent on Vietnam is blasphemous.”¹³² It also is captured in his words to his daughter Susannah upon returning home from the famous Civil Rights march to Selma with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He said, “I felt my legs were praying.”¹³³ Since for Heschel, there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, radical amazement and human sympathy are earthy and spiritual partners. Not only is compassion the index of a mature

¹³¹Kaplan, Holiness in Words, 65.

¹³²Robert McAfee Brown, Abraham J. Heschel, and Michael Novak, Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience (New York: Association Press, 1967), 49.

¹³³Heschel, Prophets, xiv. Robert McAfee Brown suggests the aim and integrity of Rabbi Heschel's life and work is encapsulated in the astonishing title Heschel had as a faculty member at Jewish Theological Seminary. He was Professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism. Brown, “Some Are Guilty, All Are Responsible: Heschel's Social Ethics,” in Merkle, ed., Exploring His Life, 124-25.

human being and the sign of an integral faith, it is also the sign of a life infused with and stirred by radical amazement.

In an article recounting the recent genesis of a Jewish spiritual direction program, Jacob Staub lends support to this essential premise that is at the heart of a mystical-prophetic care. He reports:

Contemporary liberal Jews often harbor a mistrust of “spirituality” because they fear that an internal focus will deflect us from the sacred and urgent work of *Tikkun Olam*. . . . Our experience has been the opposite. People who nurture their spiritual life clearly are infused with compassion and energy to help others to fight injustice. . . . The same people who engage in spiritual direction also find the time for the repair of the world.¹³⁴

The tendency and temptation to divorce the mystical and prophetic, to set the sacred against the secular, to divorce prayer from politics and liturgy from life, has been an equally if not greater fact of life in the Christian community and therefore a stubborn nemesis of a valid and vital Christian spirituality.¹³⁵ This, of course, is a tragic irony for all conscientious Christians. The person and work of Christ attests to the dynamic and requisite relationship between heaven and earth, love and justice, prayer and action, and spirituality and liberation. Matthew Fox goes so far as to say that one can only be a mystic and a Christian if the mysticism leads to prophecy. Otherwise, he insists, it is a flight from the demands of the Gospel. He states:

¹³⁴Jacob Staub, “I Keep God Before Me Perpetually: The Development of a Jewish Spiritual Direction Program,” *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 11, no. 4, (December 2005), 16. My sense is that with many people who identify themselves today as Christians, the situation is the exact opposite of that mentioned by Staub regarding Jews. If contemporary liberal Jews are afraid of a spirituality that will call them away from social and political responsibility, then many contemporary Christians are afraid of a social and political responsibility that will call them away from their spirituality.

¹³⁵See Robert McAfee Brown, *Spirituality and Liberation: Overcoming the Great Fallacy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988).

When mysticism interferes with prophecy there is something thoroughly un-Christian about the mysticism. Sick mysticism will be identifiable for its flight from history, an opiate substitute for justice just as Feuerbach and Marx claimed. . . . The way to encourage authentic mysticism is to encourage its sister, prophecy. For the radical lover moves beyond the world of the personal and psychological.¹³⁶

Spirituality with integrity and a mystically and prophetically informed pastoral care require the cultivation of both of these unique ways of life. A fundamental assertion on which this approach is based is that an authentic, integral faith and pastoral care require attention be given to the main thrust of each movement: to cultivating radical amazement and to offering human sympathy, to evoking personal righteousness and to promoting and protecting justice, to encouraging *tikkun ha nephesh* and to working toward *tikkun ha olam*, to nurturing contemplation and to practicing compassion. In addition to developing each end of the corresponding relationship, one of the aims of pastoral care is to bring the two together in a holy and perpetual alliance. For Heschel, the above ways are neither disconnected nor oppositional. They are not separate religious aptitudes or spiritual temperaments. Rather, they are each the full and fitting response to God or to a given reality in a specific situation within the broad spectrum of human living. The “ooh!” that is evoked from the sight of a moon rise over the Grand Tetons, the afternoon light foxtrotting on a Vermont mountain pond, the face of an old woman wrinkled with wisdom, a baby being born, or the graceful liturgical dance of geese flying in formation is different only in intonation from the “ooh!” that is gasped at the sight of human bodies (each one a *tselem elohim*) being bulldozed into giant open graves in Hitler’s death camps, a screaming Vietnamese girl running naked and burning from napalm, a grief-stricken father talking into the TV camera after learning that his son had

¹³⁶Fox, *Prayer*, 94, 95.

been beheaded by terrorists, or the fearful face of the young mother-of-four who would be dead three weeks after the minister's visit. In the deepest sense it is the exact same "ooh!," the same wordless sound the soul articulates with the help of the body when the human person is fully aware, totally engaged, and deeply moved.

Rabbi Heschel not only insists that radical amazement and prophetic sympathy are necessarily related but also that they are mutually confirming and reinforcing. The pretheological experiences of wonder and awe that are the gateway to the faith-filled acts of gratefulness, praise, and faith not only keep radical amazement alive but kindle compassion as well, just as cultivating a sympathy for all things, arousing moral outrage, and doing acts of kindness and compassion reawaken awe and gratitude. Just as theology informs action and action in turn re-informs theology in the ongoing spiral of theological reflection, so too there is a similar movement when we consider this approach in light of passionate caring, namely, contemplative consciousness and mystical living inform prophetic awareness and sympathetic living and vice versa.

Having said this, it is important to point out that although the relationship between the contemplative and active or the mystical and prophetic dimensions of faith is mutual, it is not identical. Whether brought to contemplation via prophetic action or compelled to compassionate action by way of mysticism, it is important to clarify that in this relationship, whereas the prophetic informs and re-informs the mystical, the mystical not only impels but sustains the prophetic.¹³⁷ McNamara says it well:

¹³⁷Franciscan, Richard Rohr, the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico explains the intentionality of naming the Center: "I deliberately put action at the beginning, because we have nothing we can become contemplative about until we've done something." Richard Rohr, *Simplicity: The Art of Living* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 35.

In order to engage in truly creative activity, we must learn to unite contemplation and action. Action without contemplation is blind. When we are driven into feverish activity, activity that is not inspired and empowered by contemplation, we do more harm than good. Our busyness enslaves us.¹³⁸

While not always the derivative of contemplation, compassionate action is most fully sustained and guided by contemplation. It is in contemplation where we experience most directly and compellingly the extravagant and particular love of God, oneness with the divine, inner transformation, the interconnection of all life, and sympathy for all things and all people. Especially in light of a culture that promotes and celebrates “multitasking,” that breeds freneticism, and encourages a plethora of uninspired activities, it is important for caregivers to realize that only genuine contemplation motivates, enriches, and validates legitimate action and makes its results enduringly effective. In his book, Spirituality and Liberation, Protestant theologian, Robert McAfee Brown writes of this relationship between contemplation and compassionate action by citing the long tradition, by no means confined to Christianity, seen vividly in Jesus of Nazareth’s pattern of “withdrawal and return.” Brown states:

The tradition reminds us that it is sometimes important, and even necessary, to engage in “withdrawal” from the clutter and ambiguity of our day-to-day existence so that, by getting in touch with deeper realities that elude us in the everyday world, we can gain not only a new realization of who we are but a deeper realization of who God is—gifts we can then take back with us in our “return” to the immediate demands of life.¹³⁹

Contemplation is the most authentic source of legitimate action, including the action of pastoral care, because it is by nature inexpedient. As a graced discipline, it disarms the ego and makes one available to others. Conversely, prophetic sympathy, action, and work

¹³⁸McNamara, Earthy Mysticism, 3.

¹³⁹Brown, Spirituality and Liberation, 43.

for justice insure that contemplation is authentic and not escapism, mere egoism hidden under a cowl, but rather is grounded in God's love and concern for and connection to all persons and all creation.

"A dreadful oblivion prevails in the world," Heschel laments. "The world has forgotten what it means to be human."¹⁴⁰ Mystical care and prophetic care are efforts to help others re-member themselves to their deepest, truest, and fullest humanity. Two things especially humanize and sanctify: contemplation and compassion. Thus the task of pastoral caregivers is to integrate in their lives and in their ministry the evocative and transformative way of the mystic and of the prophet. When persons and communities are able to hold the two expressions together in a holy matrimony, the chances increase that spirituality will have integrity, that life will have meaning, that human beings will become human and holy, and that the world will be put right. This is the hope, task, and purpose of a mystical-prophetic pastoral theology and care.

Rabbi Heschel asks, "Does not man cease to be human if reverence and responsibility are gone?"¹⁴¹ When contemplation is missing, compassion goes AWOL as well, for it is prayer that most effectively removes callousness.¹⁴² There is a mutually sustaining relationship between what the Jesuit priest, William O'Malley, calls "the death of wow!" and what the Buddhist clinical psychologist, Lorne Ladner, calls "the lost art of compassion." When we lose our sense of the Holy, Heschel warns, not only is there "a blackout of God," not only is there a dark night of the soul, but there is consequently a

¹⁴⁰Heschel, "On Prayer," in S. Heschel, ed. Moral Grandeur, 259.

¹⁴¹Heschel, "The God of Israel and Christian Renewal," in S. Heschel, ed. Moral Grandeur, 275.

¹⁴²Heschel, Man is Not Alone, 63.

dark night of society.¹⁴³ Renewal of humanity and all creation begins with the renewal of reverence, igniting the spark of wonder or rekindling the fire of awe, cultivating gratefulness, practicing prayer.

Pastoral Care as Supporting the Quest for Significant Being

I have argued that the purpose of pastoral care is to foster significant being by evoking, forming, accompanying, and encouraging people and communities to be contemplatively vibrant and prophetically vital. Human persons realize significance when they live lives that *signify* or point toward God. Heschel believes what makes humans unprecedented and unique is that they alone are the *symbol* or *witness* of God. Together with the involvement of God in the human situation as expressed in divine pathos, the human person's conscious commitment to symbolizing God in their lives is what makes for significant being. That is, humans experience significance by signifying. To quote a passage cited earlier:

The divine symbolism of man is not in what he *has*—such as reason or the power of speech—but in what he *is* potentially: he is able to be holy as God is holy. To imitate God, to act as He acts in mercy and love, is the way of enhancing our likeness.¹⁴⁴

According to Heschel, the actualization of personal significance involves the cultivation of the antecedents of faith, the transformation of consciousness, the practice of piety which is oriented toward transcendent living, and compassionate and just action. These come about as a result of rediscovering and responding to the “ultimate question” to which authentic religion is an answer. To become human and holy involves growing in

¹⁴³Heschel, “On Prayer,” in S. Heschel, ed. *Moral Grandeur*, 267.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid*, 126.

“the realization of our capacity to answer God’s question.”¹⁴⁵ Thus the *quest* has to do with the *question*. The intention and attention to listen for the ultimate questions is so important and crucial to authentic human becoming because, Heschel maintains, it is only in the *act of responding* that humans become aware of what is being asked of us and from where the asking comes. In other words, the movement from intimations of the divine to a sense for the realness of God occurs in and through a response. Heschel states, “Certainty of the realness of God comes about *as a response* of the whole person to the mystery and transcendence of living.”¹⁴⁶

It is in evoking, nurturing, and supporting the quest for significant being that the openness of the mystical life and the criticism of the prophetic life come together in pastoral care. As we saw above, cultivating a contemplative life by the deliberate practice of contemplative disciplines, which include evoking and developing the attitudes Heschel deems pretheological, is one essential and tangible way of becoming aware of and beginning to live our lives as an answer to the ultimate question life and God pose to us. Among other definitions, Heschel defines wonder as the state of being asked. Heschel insists the present spiritual crisis is due to the fact that humankind has forgotten what it means to be human and traces one of the chief causes of this forgetfulness to the fact that humans have forgotten the ultimate question and the imperative questions of human existence which allude to it. The eclipse of religion, and by extension the spiritual amnesia that has set in, he maintains, is due in large part to the fact that religion has reneged on its responsibility to raise continually the vital, critical questions which expose us to the ultimate question.

¹⁴⁵Wolf, Nurturing the Spirit, 73.

¹⁴⁶Heschel, God in Search, 114.

In his book Night, author and sage, Elie Wiesel tells of an encounter he had with an eccentric but holy man in his village when he was a young pious boy. He writes:

I found a master for myself, Moche the Beadle.
 He had noticed me one day at dusk, when I was praying.
 “Why do you weep when you pray? He asked me, as though he had known me a long time.
 “I don’t know why,” I answered, greatly disturbed.
 The question had never entered my head. I wept—because of something inside me that felt the need for tears. That was all I knew.
 “Why do you pray?” he asked me, after a moment.
 Why did I pray? A strange question. Why did I live? Why did I breathe?
 “I don’t know why,” I said, even more disturbed and ill at ease. “I don’t know why.”
 After that day I saw him often. He explained to me with great insistence that every question possessed a power that did not lie in the answer.
 “Man raises himself toward God by the questions he asks Him,” he was fond of repeating. “That is the true dialogue. Man questions God and God answers. But we don’t understand His answers. We can’t understand them. Because they come from the depths of the soul, and they stay there until death. You will find the true answers, Eliezer, only within yourself!”
 “And why do you pray, Moshe?” I asked him.
 “I pray to the God within me that He will give me the strength to ask Him the right questions.”¹⁴⁷

Significant being is the fruit of questing for the forgotten questions, for “the right questions” which allude to the definitive but inexpressible question. It is the task of the mystical-prophetic caregiver to see that this happens in persons and communities.¹⁴⁸

Heschel writes:

¹⁴⁷Elie Wiesel, Night (New York: Avon Books, 1960), 13-14.

¹⁴⁸In the preface of his book, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, Thomas Merton, to whom many looked for answers, writes: “I do not have clear answers to current questions. I do have questions, and, as a matter of fact, I think a man is known better by his questions than by his answers. To make known one’s questions is, no doubt, to come out in the open oneself.” Thomas Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1966), 5. Joan Chittister, OSB, writes of the power of questions to propel us toward the personal or communal work that we must do and speaks of “the necessity of questions to test the truth of our own lives.” She states, “It is the questions we ask that moves us from stage to stage of our growing, that takes us from level to level of our thoughts, however simple the

The ultimate question, bursting forth in our souls, is too startling, too heavily laden with unutterable wonder to be an academic question, to be equally suspended between yes and no. We can no longer ask: Is there a God? In humility and contrition we realize the presumption of such asking. The more deeply we meditate, the more clearly we realize that the question we ask is a question we are being asked; that *man's question about God is God's question of man*.¹⁴⁹

What Heschel is insinuating, of course, is that the essential question does not revolve around God's existence (which cannot be proven) but around *humankind's* existence, and not merely humankind's *existence* but around *meaningful* existence—existence *as life*, and as *a* life (for that is the point of the quest, both its motivation and goal). If the question could be phrased (which it cannot be) it would not revolve around whether or not God is real but whether or not humans are real, whether or not humans are truly alive. It is precisely this true aliveness that mystical-prophetic caregiving aims to promote and support. Heschel states: "The question: Is there a personal God? is a symptom of the uncertainty: Is there a personal man?"¹⁵⁰ The ultimate question is not the question we put to God or to existence, but rather is the question existence or God puts to us. Heschel reminds:

God is not an explanation of the world's enigmas or a guarantee for our salvation. He is an eternal challenge, an urgent demand. He is not a problem to be solved but a question addressed to us as individuals, as nations, as mankind.¹⁵¹

He notes further, the question is not "to be or not to be" but who and how to be.

questions may seem." *Spiritual Questions for the Twenty-First Century: Essays in Honor of Joan D. Chittister*, ed. Mary Hembrow Snyder, (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 168.

¹⁴⁹Heschel, *God in Search*, 132.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 92.

In other words, is there only meaning to what *man does*, but none to what *he is*? Becoming conscious of himself he does not stop at knowing: "I am"; he is driven to know "what" he is. Man may, indeed, be characterized as *a subject in quest of a predicate*, as a being in quest of a meaning of life, of all of life, not only of particular actions or single episodes which happen now and then.¹⁵²

Loosely speaking, the mystical spirit of care is oriented toward helping others pay attention to the question: *who am I?*, while the prophetic spirit of care is oriented toward supporting others live the question: *what am I to do?* Mystical-prophetic pastoral care supports the idea that significant being is not a final destination but the ongoing process of human becoming that unfolds as persons continue the irrepressible quest to discover if there is a relation between the state of existence and the state of meaning, between one's *being* and one's *doings*, between becoming human and becoming holy¹⁵³ Heschel states:

Those who honestly search, those who yearn and fail, we did not presume to judge. Let them pray to be able to pray, and if they do not succeed, if they have no tears to shed, let them yearn for tears, let them try to discover their heart and let them take strength from the certainty that this too is a high form of prayer.¹⁵⁴

A mystical-prophetic approach to care especially values this quest and is the ministry of accompanying people as they draw near to, wrestle with, and respond to the ultimate question. The decisive question is God's question variously put to humankind by way of the ineffable, mystery, divine presence, and finally as God's pathos as perceived and experienced in the midst of ordinary daily living. The human and holy quest requires the grace, integrity, contemplative listening and looking, and courage to discover "the problem that is addressed to us in the facts and events of the world and our own

¹⁵²Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, 192.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁵⁴Heschel, Quest for God, 89.

experience” and to construct one’s life as a personal answer.¹⁵⁵ Again, significant being hinges on persons’ awareness that something is asked of them. As an evocative-formational ministry, pastoral care seeks to call for and to help people give form to lives that are intentionally constructed as a personal answer since, as Heschel maintains, transcendent dignity in humankind resides not only in inalienable rights but also in inalienable responsibility which sympathetic-transformational care hopes to arouse.¹⁵⁶

The ultimate question, wrapped in ineffability and mystery, is not a question intelligible to the mind, formed by the mouth, or arrived at by concepts and analysis. In its presence all the mind knows is that it is only knowable beyond the scope of the mind. All the mouth knows is that it cannot be expressed in words, only shaped with the lips like the letter O. Heschel writes:

We do not need words in order to communicate with the mystery. The ineffable in us communes with the ineffable beyond us. We do not have to express God when we let our self continue to be His, the echo of His expression.¹⁵⁷

The ineffable is not comprehended, only encountered. Heschel states:

The sense of the ineffable does not give us an awareness of God. It only leads to a plane, where no one can remain both callous and calm, unstunned and unabashed; where His presence may be defied but not denied, and where, at the end, faith in Him is the only way.¹⁵⁸

The ineffable is innately present in all reality. It is the mystery-laden realm and spiritually suggestive situation in which humanity exists but most often unconsciously so. What is

¹⁵⁵Heschel, God in Search, 111.

¹⁵⁶Heschel, Insecurity of Freedom, 155.

¹⁵⁷Heschel, God In Search, 131.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 68.

needed is *a sense of* the ineffable which is available to and able to be cultivated by all people.

Five pastoral tasks

While accompanying persons and communities on this spiritual quest for the imperative and ultimate questions, pastoral caregivers have five important tasks: first, to *listen for and honor the questions people bring*; second, to *locate or create an environment or opportunity* where people are more likely to be susceptible and sensitive to the ineffable and thus better able to hear the ultimate question or the crucial questions that hint at it; third, to *discern appropriate times and ways* in which people can safely and honestly discover, raise, and grapple with significant questions; fourth, to be aware of the *life situations* that tend to force on persons and communities the ultimate but unwelcome questions; and fifth, to help others discover that becoming human and holy means something is asked and expected of them and to *encourage them in living their lives as an answer* to the ultimate questions their questing reveals.

It is important to note that an experience or glimpse of the ultimate question still must occur in the reality of daily existence, even if it is extraordinary and sabotages or rearranges person's world view, challenging how they think or live. Not only that, caregivers must be careful not to overlook the questions that are emerging from the actual lived experience of the person or persons with whom one is in conversation lest they devalue the person by dismissing their questions as trivial. Although sometimes used as a diversion or an unconscious evasion from more essential questions, the questions people bring are often those they feel are the most significant at the time. The process of ongoing pastoral care, counseling, and spiritual direction involves accompanying people as their

old questions are resolved, deemed less important, or recognized as the wrong questions altogether, and as new and more critical questions take their place and are seriously faced. Caregivers must listen with sympathy and compassion to the questions with which people come as well as listen for the deeper questions that oftentimes lay beneath those actually vocalized. They must participate in creating situations and environments that help people listen for the “mystery-oriented questions” that are tucked in and emerge from their lived experience, and at times ask more directly the questions that the historical faith community has deemed essential but which nonetheless have been repeatedly neglected or forgotten. Although these questions do not literally name the ultimate question they nonetheless contain glimpses of it.¹⁵⁹

The mystical or contemplative life, and by extension mystical care is intended to create a climate that cultivates greater awareness of and openness and response to the question that visits people in their experience of the ineffable, mystery, and divine presence. Heschel emphasizes that the ultimate question to which authentic religion is intended to be an answer, to which authentic or significant being alone is a worthy response, is discovered only in the climate in which it comes into being, namely, in the realm of the ineffable. Since the ineffable or sublime is no more the exclusive realm of joy or the beautiful than it is of the catastrophic or the disturbing, the quest to respond to the ultimate question occurs in both the mystical and the prophetic dimensions of life and care. In fact, it is in the quest to construct one’s life as an “Amen” to the ultimate question at the heart of meaningful being and living that the mystical and prophetic dimensions of pastoral care intersect. It is because the sublime is contained within the

¹⁵⁹The term “mystery-oriented questions” is from Carolyn Gratton, The Art of Spiritual Guidance (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 18.

magnificent as well as within the seemingly insignificant that pastoral caregivers need to expose people to situations that are likely to be mystery-laden, for example, camping out and rising in the middle of the night in order to watch a forecasted meteor shower. They need to create the conditions for mystical awareness like silence, long contemplative looking, or deep listening and thereby increase a person's ability to take notice and appreciate the sublime mystery of being.

Within the context of mystical (evocative-formational) care, caregivers are charged with exposing people to situations or creating an environment where the ineffable is more likely to be noticed and experienced and therefore where the ultimate question is more likely to emerge and be felt. In so doing, contemplative caregivers help others to notice, to *feel*, and to offer a total response to reality. Although as mentioned, the sublime inhabits the magnificent and the common, the grandiose and the seemingly inconsequential, and despite the fact that the ineffable is not a thing that can be made to appear like an object from behind a curtain but rather is a spiritual suggestiveness of reality and life, natural conditions can be discovered and situations can be created to intentionally enhance people's susceptibility to and awareness of this allusiveness to transcendent meaning despite the inability to express it.¹⁶⁰ As suggested above in another context, immersion in or intimate contact with nature is a situation that often can expose us to the "moreness" of life. The example earlier about sitting silently and watching the sun set, or being outside and feeling the wild force of a coming storm, the experience of sharing something meaningful with others, or finding a dark place at night to gaze at the star-spangled sky, are simple but profound ways to expose people to the "moreness" of

¹⁶⁰To suggest that conditions can be created to enhance people's ability to notice and respond to the ineffable is not to be confused with activities that are overly contrived, manipulative, or agenda-laden.

existence. Solitude, silence, a trip to the Museum of Tolerance, a visit to a children's oncology ward, or a service project in an impoverished area, any planned or unplanned occasion that evokes real looking and listening, real tasting and savoring, real feeling and pondering, where persons are faced with the mysteriously deep or superfluous dimension of life by which the ultimate question comes to us, are the concern and pastoral responsibility of a mystically-prophetic care.

One chief responsibility of prophetic (sympathetic-transformational) care is to make sure that the essential questions are not forgotten. In light of Heschel's work, as well as that of Brueggemann and Leech discussed earlier in this study, it is sometimes the role of the caregiver to challenge the dominant consciousness, to stimulate maladjustment to the status quo, to prompt the reflection of unchallenged assumptions, or to challenge deeply held convictions whether on a personal or communal level. One way prophetic caregivers can encourage significant being in a culture that moves back and forth between the supercilious and the shallow is by raising the decisive questions inherited and learned from the lived experience of the community of faith. Questions like: Where are you? (Gen. 3:9) Am I my brother or sister's keeper? (Gen. 4:9) If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8:31) What is truth? (Jn. 18:38) How can people be born again when they are old? (Jn. 3:4) What do people gain by all the toil at which they toil under the sun? (Eccl. 1:3) Where can I run from your Spirit? (Ps. 139:7) Who is my neighbor? (Lk. 10:29) Woman (or man), why are you weeping? (Jn. 20:15) What must I do to inherit eternal life? (Lk. 10:25) Whether preaching, teaching, counseling, guiding, hearing confession, accompanying, or challenging, caregivers need to be discerning and imaginative but not bashful about retrieving the significant questions born out of the lived

wisdom of their community of faith, knowing that as profound as these questions are they still are only faint echoes of the ultimate question which comes enigmatically and to which each singular person or community must listen and respond.

Equally important, sympathetic caregivers must be aware of limit-situations where important questions emerge and call for serious reflection. What is most essential is not answering these questions in an academic sense but living with them, tracing them back to the actual situations that account for their coming into being, since the ultimate question and the reality of ineffable meaning to which these questions allude are only “apprehended in the concrete and with immediacy.”¹⁶¹ The deepest questions are often the oldest questions arising in new situations under contemporary circumstances. Mystical-prophetic care is both evocative and provocative. Whereas mystical care creates a milieu for listening more deeply for the question God asks, prophetic care hopes to insure that the eternal challenge is heard and experienced, for as Heschel puts it, “we are born to be an answer to His question.”¹⁶² “The more deeply we listen, the more we become stripped of the arrogance and callousness which alone would enable us to refuse.”¹⁶³

Given that ultimate questions often emerge in experiences of limit or ultimacy, and given that pastoral caregivers are called to be with people during these times, the unique and privileged role of the caregiver is to compassionately accompany and sympathetically support persons in “living the questions” when the mystery they experience arises not from the ecstasy or blissfulness but rather from the chaos or

¹⁶¹Ibid., 62-63.

¹⁶²Heschel, God in Search, 416.

¹⁶³Ibid., 112.

confusion that is their life. Theologian John Shea, remarks, “We do not pursue Mystery on its own terms.”¹⁶⁴ Similarly, Heschel says, “We do not choose to raise the question, we are compelled.”¹⁶⁵ Two such examples where essential questions arise and call for compassionate care are the confrontation with negative contingency and the experience of collapse. Shea writes:

[N]ot far from [the] experience of positive contingency, the exhilarating awareness that life is given, is the anxious awareness that it is not guaranteed. No insurance policy can quite tame the future. Death and all its lesser indignities—illness, suffering, and loss—await us. All our devices to make life safe—amassing money and military might—are ultimately only stalls. Our meanings are fragile, our loves passing, our hopes precarious. When the reliability of all we have constructed is brought into question, we enter the dimension of Mystery. We wonder what it all means. The fast answers that our immediate environments give are no longer seductive. We look beyond into Mystery.¹⁶⁶

Later, in the same book, he continues:

Another path to Mystery is collapse. When order crumbles, Mystery rises. When our most prized assumptions about life are suddenly ripped from us, Mystery appears as a fury which threatens to engulf us. No protective symbols are available, no interpretive culture buffers its impact on the human soul. Its appearance is frightening; its name is the abyss.¹⁶⁷

Although the people experiencing negative contingency, the collapse of their world, or the frightening reality of the abyss may not be able to “live the questions” let alone love them as the poet Rilke advises, with the compassionate companionship of the caregiver they may “gradually, without even noticing it, live [their] way into the answer” even if that answer is learning how not too quickly to flee the darkness, even if that answer is the

¹⁶⁴John Shea, Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1978), 32.

¹⁶⁵Heschel, God in Search, 130.

¹⁶⁶Shea, Stories of God, 27-28.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 29.

graced acceptance of no answer.¹⁶⁸ Poet Mary Oliver writes: "I want every poem to 'rest' in intensity, I want it to be rich with 'pictures of the world.' . . . I want the poem to ask something and at its best moments, I want the question to remain unanswered."¹⁶⁹

Pastoral caregivers are charged with accompanying people whose lives have come to "rest" in intensity. They are commissioned to encourage others by their contemplative and compassionate presence, so that despite living with unanswered questions, the receivers of care might experience daily existence as life-giving not death-dealing.

Persons on the quest for significant being, pastoral caregivers are called to offer others the gift of human communion, standing with them in the midst of life's precarious antics, painful betrayals, violent collapses, and unsettled predicaments. By doing so caregivers convey that soul-inquiry is not concerned primarily about "problem-oriented questions that ask for advice on what one should do. They are mystery-oriented questions that flow from a heart that seeks a future for its love."¹⁷⁰ Heschel reminds his readers, the ultimate question is not a speculative issue but rather a religious and existential dilemma that arises from particular life circumstances. Again, it cannot be experienced and dealt with "apart from the situation in which it exists, apart from the insights in which it is evoked and in which it is involved."¹⁷¹ Therefore, the vital role and responsibility of the pastoral caregiver is to help the person to live the tangible situation as deeply and as honestly as possible. The ultimate question arises on the level of the ineffable, but in daily occurrences and acts not in abstract concepts.

¹⁶⁸Rainer Maria Rilke, tran. Stephen Mitchell, Letters to a Young Poet (New York: Random House, Inc. 1984), 34-35.

¹⁶⁹Mary Oliver, Winter Hours: Prose, Prose Poems, and Poems. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 24.

¹⁷⁰Gratton, Art of Spiritual Guidance, 18.

¹⁷¹Heschel, God in Search, 130.

As we have stated, the same fullness of being that caregivers aim to call forth and support in others and the same means for doing so are important and necessary for them as well. Caregivers also must intentionally listen for the crucial questions and for the ultimate question to which their life is intended to be an answer. The ministry of pastoral care, grounded in theology and the treasury of the community's experience of faith and its understanding and quest for significant being, invites caregivers to listen for and live into the ultimate question and to accompany and encourage others in the quest for the vital questions and question by which God summons us to transcendent and meaningful lives.

Explanation of the Tree of Life Exercise

In Lurianic Kabbalah, as has been discussed previously, the sefirotic Tree of Life stands as the central symbolic motif. Its structure of tiered-triads comprised of polar energies, each with its own intermediary force, portrays not only the vital life-force and inter-workings of the universe, but also of the human person. In Kabbalah, questing for and sustaining significant being means not only taking into account the essential polarity of human existence but also bringing those opposing *sefirot* into a healthy interplay and dynamic balance.

Working as a psychotherapist and teacher of Kabbalah, clinical psychologist, Edward Hoffman, has devoted much of his professional life making connections between the spiritual wisdom of Kabbalah and the theory and practice of modern psychology. Despite the confusing and complex nature of the dynamic structure of the *sefirot*, Hoffman points out:

Jewish mystics have always emphasized that their evocative metaphysical system is meant to guide us meaningfully in everyday life. Rather than offering merely an intriguing set of abstract principles, the Kabbalah is intended to provide a pathway by which we can better and more joyfully fulfill our particular mission on earth.¹⁷²

The holy alliance argued for in this project between the mystical and prophetic dimensions of life and faith can be said to be held together in a lively tension by a third and middle sphere we have identified as significant being or transcendent living. In a sense this holy communion mirrors the flow of life forces and the dynamic balance between them inherent in the kabbalistic system of the *sefirot*. Hoffman believes that “the Tree of Life can serve as a fascinating guidepost—and compelling map—toward better understanding our inner world.”¹⁷³ To this end Hoffman has designed an inventory system based on the ten *sefirot* of the Tree of Life that can be used as a spiritual tool to enhance one’s self- knowledge and to gain sense of direction in one’s life at present. This inventory can be customized and utilized by therapists with clients, by spiritual directors with directees, and by pastors with individual parishioners or entire congregations for discernment and spiritual growth.

In keeping with the Hasidic tradition of encouraging persons to focus on self-reflection especially during the annual periods just prior to Rosh ha-Shanah and Passover, Hoffman advises that persons and/or communities perform the Tree of Life inventory at least twice a year.

¹⁷²Edward Hoffman, “The Tree of Life and the ‘City of the Just’: Kabbalistic Exercises for Inner Growth,” in E. Hoffman, ed. Opening the Gates, 9.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, 10.

Before giving the instructions of how to use the exercise, a quick review of the ten *sefirot* and their relationship to one another is in order (See Diagram 3).¹⁷⁴ The first *sefiyah* known as *Keter* (Crown), represents the primal stirrings of the *Ein Sof* and signifies the highest of life forces. It actually has no specific content so lofty has it been considered through the ages by kabbalists. Below, on the right and left respectively, are *Hokhmah* and *Binah*. These two *sefirot* correspond to active and receptive intelligence respectively, the first being closely linked with primordial wisdom and the Torah, the latter being associated with contemplation. The first triad represents the transition from the divine, *Ein Sof*, to the spiritual reality.

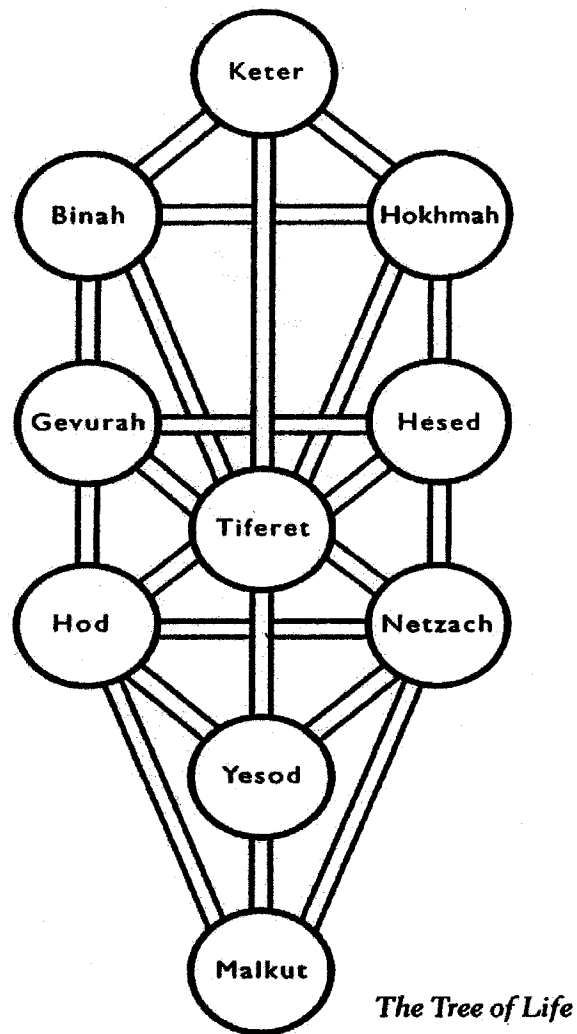
The next triad is the source of the moral order and pictures *Hesed* on the right, *Gevurah* (often called *Din*) directly across from it on the left, and *Tif'eret* centered below and between them. *Hesed* stands for the mercy, grace, or love of God whereas *Gevurah*, which literally means strength, represents not just the power of God but the Judgment or severity of God. Mediating these two is *Tif'eret*, which stands for the compassion or beauty of God. Again, Kabbalah and Judaism are grounded in the conviction that proper balance between these two is absolutely necessary and prevents either an excess of love or an excess of severity not merely within the universe and human persons but within God as well.

The third triad is the source of the psychic and physical existences. It is composed of *Netzach* on the right, *Hod* on the left, and *Yesod* in the middle below. *Netzach* stands for the lasting endurance of God, *Hod* for God's majesty, and *Yesod* is typically viewed as the generative and stabilizing power of the material universe. Beneath this triad is the tenth and last *sefirot*, *Malkhut* which stands for the presence of the divine in the world. It

¹⁷⁴See Diagram 3. See also Chapter 4 for a more complete explanation of the *sefirotic* structure.

is the point at which the external world comes into contact with the upper spheres, the final manifestations of the divine, the *shekinah*.¹⁷⁵

(Diagram 3)



We will now move to the instructions for the inventory itself. What follows is a adaptation and slight abbreviation of Edward Hoffman's spiritual exercise.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵Heschel, "Mystical Element in Judaism," in S. Heschel, ed. Moral Grandeur, 170.

¹⁷⁶Hoffman, "The Tree of Life and the 'City of the Just'", in E. Hoffman, ed. Opening the Gates, 9-15.

Conducting the Tree of Life Exercise¹⁷⁷

Refer to Diagram 4. Enter the date at the top right hand corner of the page. Every third line contains the name of one of the ten *sefirot*, with a line to its left and a line to its right with a minus sign on the left margin and a plus sign along the right margin.¹⁷⁸ Because the kabbalists teach that roots of the Tree of Life lie in the transcendental realm and the *sefirot* manifest themselves to us in the lower Universe of Action, the ten names begin with *Keter* at the top and end with *Malkhut* on the bottom. Under each *sefirah* are three lines for jotting notes and making comments.

Kabbalists believe that each *Sefirah* may function within the totality of our being (spiritual, emotional, and physical) either too weakly or too intensely, and therefore the goal is an optimal manifestation of each in one's life. For this reason, above the column of lines to the left of the name of the particular *sefirah* is the word UNDERACTIVE. To the right of the name of the *sefirah* is the word OVERACTIVE. Above the names of the ten *sefirot* is the term OPTIMAL, signifying optimal activity for that *sefirah*.

You are now ready to begin taking an inventory of your inner universe by prayerfully reflecting in descending order, beginning with *Hokhmah*, for each *sefirah* has its special psychospiritual importance in the totality of your life.¹⁷⁹ You may do the inventory one *sefirah* at a time, by doubling up polar *sefirot* (for example, *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, *Hesed* and *Gevurah*, and *Netzach* and *Hod*) or divide the reflections by triads. The

¹⁷⁷ A brief explanation of the *sefirotic* Tree of Life focusing mainly on the notions of polarities, interaction, and balance will be helpful, especially when working with Christian persons or communities.

¹⁷⁸ I have concisely portrayed the inventory sheet in order to fit it on one page. Facilitators of this exercise are encouraged to redo the format so that beneath each *sefirah* there is more room to write.

¹⁷⁹ Hoffman recommends beginning the reflection with *Keter*. Because these experiences are so rare in life and in order to get the exercise off to a good start, I recommend beginning with *Hokhmah* and saving *Keter* for last.

THE TREE OF LIFE SPIRITUAL INVENTORY

(Diagram 4)

UNDERACTIVE	OPTIMAL	OVERACTIVE
--	Keter	+
--	Hokhmah	+
--	Binah	+
--	Hesed (self)	+
--	Hesed (others)	+
--	Gevurah (self)	+
--	Gevurah (others)	+
--	Tiferet	+
--	Netzach	+
--	Hod	+
--	Yesod	+
--	Malkut	+

exercise can be done in one sitting, or spread out longer with quiet breaks in between each *sefirah* or series of *sefirot*. Participants should give at least one hour to the inventory. A time of two to three hours in the context of a day of prayer and reflection with breaks in between with a simple meal following is ideal. You may want to sandwich the actual inventory exercise between a simple sequence of a song, scripture reading, and prayer at the opening and close of the day. If you like, you may play instrumental music softly in the background. Whether done individually, in a group, or as a large congregation, prayerful silence should be the tone during the exercise.

Sit erect but comfortably. Close your mouth and gently breathe through your nostrils. Clear your mind by concentrating for a few minutes on your breath as it enters and leaves your body.¹⁸⁰

1. Because *Keter* moments are so unusual, we will begin with *Hokhmah* and save *Keter* for last.
2. *Hokhmah* often comes like a proverbial lightning flash. It is a sudden moment of realization, a profound illumination. In such moments we often feel intense wonder, awe, deep peace, total trust, or bliss. We suddenly are able to see with absolute clarity and discernment, whether our heightened perception is of an object, another person, a specific situation, or our life. If you wonder, how could it be possible to have too much of this quality at one time, artificially creating such experiences with the use of mind-altering drugs like LSD or Ecstasy would be an example. *How active has *Hokhmah* been in your life during the past year (six months)? Can you recall any “peak experiences,” any

¹⁸⁰When done in a group, the instructions that follow may be read aloud by one person who sets the tone, guides the pace of the inventory, and sends people away and calls people back from breaks.

significant moments of illumination, clarity, surprise, or revelation? Although you cannot control these moments, would you say they have been too few (or too weak), too many (too intense), or optimal? Circle the minus symbol if too few or too weak, the plus symbol if too many or too intensely, or the name *Hokhmah* if optimal. Use the lines beneath the *Hokhman sefirah* to record these moments, or to jot your reflections.

3. *Binah* embraces our ability to process intellectually and rationally the revelations of *Hokhmah*. In your everyday life, this is represented in making time for quiet reflection, contemplation, prayerful study and reading of scripture, spiritual reading or listening to tapes, and participating in classes or workshops. Over the past year (six months) what has been the quality of *Binah* in your life? Too little *Binah* energy means not taking the time to give appropriate attention to integrating peak experiences or “aha” moments (*Hokhmah*). Yet, too much *Binah* energy can mean enlightening experiences or mystical moments are overanalyzed, dissected, and rationalized to death. Use the lines beneath *Binah* to jot notes and reflections. Circle the most fitting symbol or word. (*This would be an appropriate point for a break*)
4. We now descend to the *sefirot* that are linked to and reflective of your emotional condition in day-to-day living. *Hesed* encompasses such traits as acceptance, altruism, compassion, forgiveness, generosity, kindness, and sympathy. This energy manifest itself in two primary directions: toward oneself and toward others. Sometimes it is easier for you to extend acceptance, generosity, forgiveness, or tender love toward everyone but

yourself. You are more tolerant of other people's shortcomings and faults than of your own. Of course, the converse also can be true. Like all *sefirot*, *Hesed* can be too weak or infrequent in your life or too dominant or all-consuming. Its absence makes us grim, selfish, insufferable, and/or hypercritical. But too much *Hesed* energy can make us maudlin, overly sentimental, and indulgent. Over the past year (six months), how active has been *Hesed* in your daily living? Toward yourself? Toward other persons? Use this time to reflect on the presence of *Hesed* in your life. Use the lines beneath *Hesed* to jot notes and reflections. Circle the appropriate symbol or word.

5. Our next *sefirah* is *Gevurah*. It encompasses the quality of discipline, limit-setting, structure, discernment. *Gevurah* is the counterbalance to *Hesed*. Thus, if we lack an appropriate sense of personal boundaries or discretion, if we lack appropriate discernment or judgment concerning other people or situations, we are likely to be disappointed, hurt, and misled or likely to disappoint, hurt, and mislead repeatedly in life. As is the case with *Hesed* energy, *Gevurah* is often manifested toward ourselves and toward other people very differently. Some persons are unrelentingly stern in their judgment toward others but never would adopt a similar attitude toward one's own deeds or lack thereof. For some, the opposite is true, being far more intolerant or critical of oneself than of others. Thinking back over the last year (six months) of your life, how have you experienced *Gevurah*? Toward yourself? Toward other persons. Use the lines beneath *Gevurah* to jot notes or reflections. Circle the appropriate symbol or word.

6. At the very center of the Tree of Life is *Tef'eret*. In your daily living it encompasses aesthetic beauty of an intensely spiritual quality. People typically experience this energy in soul-stirring music, exalted poetry or prose, inspiring artwork, or scenes from film or real life. Sometimes we experience moments of *Tif'eret* when gazing at the face of another, for example, at the saintly or sagacious face of an elderly woman or the radiant innocence of a bald-headed child in an oncology ward. Too little *Tif'eret* can impart a gray dullness to your days and nights. But too much can be harmful as well, if the aesthetic experience becomes obsessive and all-domineering. How active has been your *Tif'eret* energy the last year (six months) of your life? Use the lines beneath *Tif'eret* to jot notes and reflections. Has it been too weak? Too dominant? Optimal? Circle the most fitting symbol or word. (*This would be an appropriate point for a break*)

7. The next *sefirot* pertain to the realm of our bodily instincts. *Netzach* and *Hod* encompass what we physically take into our being, such as food, drink, medication, and the metabolism of exercise. On the right side of the Tree of Life, *Netzach* signifies the enhancement of this dimension. Placed on the left or constricting side, *Hod* constitutes its limitation. If *Netzach* is too weak in your inner being, you derive too little satisfaction from food, drink, and physical exercise. You lose the blessing in this important aspect of living. If *Netzach* is too strong, then the pursuit of food, drink, or physical activity can manifest itself in addictive ways: overeating, alcoholism or drug addiction, incessant jogging or working out. Has your *Netzach* energy been manifested

optimally this last year (six months) of your life? Use the lines beneath *Netzach* to jot notes and reflections. Mark with a circle the most appropriate symbol or word.

8. *Hod* acts the counterbalance to *Netzach*. Upon reflection, it becomes readily apparent whether or not there is ample *Hod* energy in our physical life. Have you been able to apply necessary and reasonable brakes on your bodily appetites? Or, have you been overly ascetic and compulsive regarding your body's natural desires? For example, not eating (anorexia) or not exercising (lethargy), in other words, underfunctioning, can be a sign of too much *Hod*. During the past year, how active has been *Hod* in your life? Use the line beneath *Hod* to jot notes and reflections. Circle the symbol or word that is most descriptive of your *Hod* energy this past year (six months).
9. *Yesod*, the ninth *sefirot* in the Tree of Life, encompasses the dimension of sexuality. The Kabbalah views the sexual drive as a significant and sacred aspect of human life. Lovemaking between husband and wife, especially on the Sabbath, is considered an intentionally consecrated and spiritual act, one that brings the *Shekinah* back into the mundane world and unites her with her bridegroom, *Tiferet*. In broader terms, *Yesod* represents not merely your sexual drive but your energy or vital life force that in varying degrees of intensity can be guided into any number of generative, meaningful acts, from gardening to making music or art to feeding the homeless to teaching English as a second language to woodworking to visiting shut-ins. Too much *Yesod* energy can materialize as promiscuity, sexual addiction, workaholism, or

chronic busyness. Too little can be a sign of depression, isolation, hopelessness, a diminished sex drive, or other physiologically or emotionally caused conditions. Has your *Yesod* energy been optimally utilized this last year (six months)? Has it been underactive, overactive, or optimal? Circle the appropriate symbol or word. Use the lines beneath *Yesod* to jot notes or reflections.

10. In your everyday the *sefirah*, *Malkhut* signifies your connection to the physical world of nature—to animals, plants, all living things, all creation, and to the planet itself. In our highly mechanistic and technological society, *Malkhut* energy is often greatly absent. Like all the *sefirot*, *Malkhut* needs to manifest harmoniously. As the contemporary field of ecopsychology suggests, too little *Malkhut* energy can be harmful to us, and as we have seen more recently, harmful to our planet and therefore to the generations yet to come. Too much of this quality might manifest itself in a person's obsession with plants or animals to the exclusion of forming healthy relationships with other persons. Thinking over this past year (six months), how have you experienced your *Malkhut* energy? Use the lines beneath *Malkhut* to jot any notes or reflections. Circle the symbol or word most appropriate. (*This would be an appropriate point to break before the final brief reflection*)
11. We will end our spiritual inventory with the first or highest *sefirot*, *Keter*, often symbolized as a Crown. *Keter* lies so close to the mysteries of *Ein Sof* (that is, to “the Infinite” or to that aspect of the Godhead which is completely concealed or beyond human comprehension) that we possess virtually no way

of describing its essence. In your own life, the presence of *Keter* would be marked by a sense of overwhelming transcendence, surpassing the power of words to convey. It is a burning bush moment; a direct encounter with the presence of God—sometimes dazzlingly dark, at times a “terrible beauty,” but undeniably real despite the inability to articulate it. You should not be concerned if you have nothing to mark nor be tempted to identify an otherwise meaningful peak experience as *Keter*. The experience of *Keter* is extremely rare, even over the course of a lifetime. You would know it if you had one. Consequently, this reflection is the shortest, for you will know a *Keter* moment if you had one. In the unlikely case that you have had such an experience this past year (six months), jot down words or images that allude to it. In the more likely case that you have not, simply end the day quietly, with your eyes closed, gently breathing in and out, with an attitude of either complete openness to God or passionate yearning for God (*This concludes the exercise*).

As Edward Hoffman maintains:

If conducted thoroughly, the self-inventory described above can do much to enhance our well-being and illumine aspects of our present life that need change or improvement. The Tree of Life can provide a valuable map for looking at ourselves honestly and thoroughly. In this way, we will be better able to carry out our unique *tikkun*, or mission on earth.¹⁸¹

In the lexicon of this dissertation, we can say that the Tree of Life inventory assists persons and communities to reflect on the relationship between the mystical and

¹⁸¹Hoffman, “The Tree of Life and the ‘City of the Just,’” in E. Hoffman, ed. Opening the Gates, 15.

prophetic dimensions of life and faith in an effort to cultivate, nurture, and support them in the quest for significant being

Conclusion

In this study I have articulated Abraham Heschel's comprehensive view of the human person, his spiritual exegesis of our contemporary culture, and his recommendation of a pattern of living that corresponds to humankind's dignity and contains the clues for transcendent living. In light of Heschel's work, and the ideas of select dialogue partners, we have established that the aim of pastoral care is to offer to others real presence and radical love in the hope of encouraging and supporting persons and communities to become more deeply human and more truly holy, society to become compassionate and just, and the universe to become with human cooperation what God created and intended it to be. Pastoral care is the response to people facing not only the perpetual concerns and dilemmas inherent in the human condition, for example, issues of meaning, crisis, health, relationships, transitions, loss, and grief, but also the problems and predicaments that emerge from the specific ailments and conditions unique to the society and times which have given rise to them. It is my conviction that in a world marked by the loss of a felt presence of God, by the loss of wonder and a contemplative consciousness, by a sense of endless restlessness; in a time when people's daily lives are governed and guided by technology more than theology, when people are committed more to acquiring information than cultivating appreciation; in a society dictated by the expedient, the spirit of excessive rationalism, vulgar materialism, callousness, and addiction to violence; in a church where creed has replaced faith, where the meaning of liturgy and life with meaning have been divorced from one another, and where the voice

of authority overpowers the voice of compassion, only a pastoral theology and a practice of care that is intentionally mystical and deliberately prophetic will be substantive and imaginative enough to guide, encourage, and heal persons and communities as they engage in the realities of life in this new millennium.

The purpose of this dissertation has been to show that in the distinguished work and personal witness of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel we have a coherent, elegant, and provocative theological vision that provides the motivation, task, method, and purpose of just such a mystical-prophetic pastoral care. This vision offers a much needed and alternative approach to the more dominant medical model and psychotherapeutic paradigm that dominated pastoral theology, care, and counseling the last half of the twentieth century.

The *motivation* for mystical-prophetic care is the original, free, and creative action of God which is love. Divine pathos, or the compassionate trajectory of God toward humanity and creation, is the motive force for all pastoral care which is to be made available to believer and unbeliever, rich and poor, friend and stranger, young and old, perpetually broken and relatively whole alike.

The *task* is to love others by acknowledging them as sacred images and by awakening them to and supporting them in the quest for significant being, that is, in living lives compatible with being the *tselem elohim*. Significant being, or becoming human and holy, involves shifting the center of one's subjectivity from Self to God and holding together the knot of heaven and earth realized by the conscious and intentional interlacing of radical amazement and deep sympathy, prayer and compassion, openness to mystery and commitment to promote and protect justice. The aspiration of pastoral

caregivers is to embody and convey the same cultivation and integration of these polarities that they seek to evoke, nurture, and support in the receivers of their care.

The *method* or approach for doing this is variously evocative, formational, sympathetic, and transformational. On the one hand, it enacts care by contemplative presence, evoking in people and helping them to form within their lives mystical awareness characterized by wonder and awe, deep gratitude and reverence, prayer and faith. On the other hand, it enacts care by offering others compassionate presence, inviting through deep sympathy and solidarity honest responses to reality, for example, anguish and mourning, hope and amazement.

The *purpose* of pastoral care is not the care of isolated souls seeking personal salvation, but the cultivation and support of soulful persons and communities of faith living on and caring for a bruised and broken earth, and for the just and peaceful renewal of the universe. In the blessed and messy ministry of pastoral care, the aim of mystical-prophetic caregivers is to help people discover or recover the capacity to *feel* and to *be moved*, and to offer *a total response to reality*. This full human response is represented, on the one hand, by radical amazement, by wonder and awe, and on the other hand, by prophetic sympathy and compassionate action in the service of justice.

The hallmark of becoming human and holy is *responsiveness* and therefore involves being moved, whether by the mystical awareness of the gratuitousness of God's love or by the prophetic awareness of the demands this love makes on us. Awakening to a world of wonder, creating a communion of care, cultivating a spirituality of "oohing" and "aahing" that is equally operative in acts of contrition and moments of delight, in the presence of a grief-stricken mother or an afternoon moonrise; evoking and nurturing

people of praise, gratefulness, and compassion, creating a safe and reverent space for the other to come into being, acknowledging grief and inviting mourning and critical reflection, and assisting people in responding fully to a given reality; criticizing and resisting injustice anywhere, promoting and protecting justice everywhere, practicing joy and supporting hope, this is the impossible possibility, the sacred calling and human responsibility, the means of grace and the holy task of any and all mystical-prophetic caregivers willing to be so moved.

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